

THE REAL WORLD

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ROBERT HERRICK



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THE REAL WORLD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR



THE COMMON LOT.

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM.

THE WEB OF LIFE.

THE REAL WORLD

BY

ROBERT HERRICK

AUTHOR OF "THE WEB OF LIFE," "THE GOSPEL OF
FREEDOM," "THE MAN WHO WINS," "LITERARY
LOVE-LETTERS AND OTHER STORIES," ETC.

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To

R. M. L.

*“And though we wear out life, alas !
Distracted as a homeless wind,
In beating where we must not pass,
In seeking what we shall not find ;*

*“Yet we shall one day gain, life past,
Clear prospect o'er our being's whole ;
Shall see ourselves, and learn at last
Our true affinities of soul.”*

“THE severe Schools shall never laugh me out of the Philosophy of Hermes, that this visible World is but a Picture of the invisible, wherein, as in a Pourtraict, things are not truely, but in equivocal shapes, and as they counterfeit some more real substance in that invisible fabrick.”

—SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

BOOK I
BOYHOOD

THE REAL WORLD

CHAPTER I

HE hung there peering over the picket fence into the March dusk long after he had really given up all hope of seeing his brother's tall form come up the lane. Steve usually got home from the Academy by one o'clock, or a little after. Jack had looked for him pretty steadily since twelve. A dozen times his grip on the pickets had tightened nervously when he detected some one in the vague territory at the extremity of the lane, and then slowly relaxed as a stranger's countenance emerged on a nearer view. At first the day had been brilliantly lighted with clear sun, but as the hours crept on and the wrong figures repeated themselves with increasing frequency, thin vaporish clouds had spread themselves over the blue sky, and a spring fog had come from the distant seacoast, filtering through the straggling houses, casting a mantle of doubt over common objects. So the persons of the passers-by had taken on an unreality, a vagueness of outline, corresponding with the cloudy thoughts, the disappointment in the boy's heart. Neighbor Pancoast's yard, midway of the lane, began to fill with whitish ghosts; the open field

along the distant avenue, where the older boys played ball, expanded into a gray limitless moor; the figures passing from time to time into the cross-streets formed an endless procession of uncouth giants. So strongly had this insubstantial appearance of the visible world got hold of the boy that when the shuffling figure of old man Cliff paused opposite him and the old man said, "What are yer lookin' fer?" Jack drew back from the fence without replying, frightened by the earthly habit of speech betrayed by this bulky shadow. When the old man resumed his shamble down the lane, the boy relapsed at once into the hypnotic spell created by the stream of silent, foggy forms.

Earlier in the afternoon, before the mist had blotted out the usual aspect of affairs, his sister had come from the house to entice him from his post; she had tried to soften the keen edge of his disappointment with a piece of candied ginger. But she was an ineffective person, whose chief offices in life were feebly consolatory. After the fashion of those whose dull perceptions are incapable of sounding the gulfs of grief, she believed that soft words and candied ginger were adequate poultices for all woes. Thus he had clung to his post by the picket fence, not encouraging with a reply this offer of weak sympathy. The silence, the moving illusory figures, were a pleasanter balm than any she had to offer!

Their father had some free tickets from the opera company that was filling its annual spring engagement in the neighboring city. In years before, whenever there were tickets, their mother had been induced after much

coaxing to go to the opera; but this year she had refused so stubbornly that the tickets for the matinée had been handed over to Steve, with the understanding that he was to come home from the Academy promptly and take his younger brother to the opera. This arrangement had been made the evening before, after some wrangling between his father and his mother that closed in the usual recriminations, abuse, and, finally, sullen silence. Steve escaped these frequent thunderstorms by going to a neighbor's, or down to the shops in the "square"; the younger boy, who was not permitted to leave the house after dark for fear of possible corruptions, withdrew to his attic room, or to the cellar, where the noise of harsh words penetrated only in the louder bursts of passion. But last night both boys had been present at the quarrel, and, moreover, Jack had seen his father hand over the tickets to Steve this morning before he left the house. There could be no mistake on his part; it was only one of those irrational interruptions in the flow of events that made all life so chaotic, so unreal!

He knew little enough about the opera. It was something like the theatre, — he had been once to see "Hamlet," — only there was singing, his sister said, and it was nicer. Some of the things they sang in opera he had heard, for his father often played accompaniments in concerts, and now and then the performers had come to the house to rehearse their arias. These times he had hung around the house, in the dining room, or in the yard outside, savoring surreptitiously the sweeter bars, the more melodious passages of the florid arias. He

recalled with especial vividness one of these people, — a woman, who sang contralto in the church where his father had been organist; and her voice still thrilled him with a curious feeling of mystery, of perfect harmony, like a peaceful day in the house, when his parents were of one accord, not unlike a well-oiled mechanism, such as a delicately made knife, that works precisely and smoothly, as it ought to do. That strange sense of the harmony of another world, into which the voice of the singer had lifted him for a few seconds, sank deeper into his memory because of the strident catastrophe of its end. The swelling, tumultuous note where the contralto's voice rested powerfully, had been broken by the noise of sharp, angry voices in dispute. He knew at once that there was some row. It was the last time the contralto came to the house. The strip of neglected yard, with its rotting fence and dying peach tree, took hold of the boy's imagination at that moment all the more acutely. The dull day, the dreary yard, — his own bleak little cosmos, — was all the drearier for the singer's notes; nevertheless, he craved the excitement, as one might crave a narcotic that brought its relentless sequel of pain. The hope of hearing that voice made him almost willing to go to church, whither since he was five he had been scrupulously driven by his mother. There, in what seemed to him the interminable routine of forms and words, he waited for the moments of perfect song; and they were rare, indeed, coming unexpectedly in the middle of the *Te Deum*, in a single bar of a tedious anthem, in the gently chanted *Kyrie Elison*, — never

sounding at all for many weeks at a time. But there was ever the chance! And when the note was struck, the little church, of a rude, mill-made gothic character, expanded largely; the quiescent worshippers, soggy from their late Sunday breakfasts, rose and shone as beautiful men and women: the other world enfolded him, and he was content.

So keen was his longing for this other world of harmony that he had found new ways of summoning it,—certain books, a few moments of the day at certain seasons of the year. Sometimes the vision had come of its own accord when he had retreated to the dusty cellar to escape the storms above, and these moments had been the best, because they had not been bought by any effort; and fading they left in their train less dinginess, less disappointment.

So the opera had stirred a vast cloud of phantoms for the few hours that he had had to expect it,—he wished it were a week off,—and he had promised himself unconsciously three hours of just such trance as the contralto's aria from the *Messiah* had raised. He had not dared to say anything to Steve about the engagement—he judged it would be safer to take it for granted. When he finally realized that Steve was not coming, unspeakable rage slowly suffocated his heart; he thought of what he could do to hurt this stronger person. He knew it would be useless to speak to his mother, as she would in the end take Steve's part, no matter what the quarrel might be. Mary would try to keep him from telling his father to avoid the family dispute;

but he would not be appeased, he would make Steve suffer!

But as the day wore on, and the mist came up the lane, and the dull details of his landscape transformed themselves, his rage died out, and a wistful wonder succeeded — a wonder why so much of the time the untidy yard, the dusty street, the ugly men, the quarrelsome family existed, and so rarely, so briefly, this other kind of a world, which seemed to have a better right to exist, took its place. Alas! every one persisted in acting as if there were but one kind of world. Mary, for example, — he doubted if Mary knew of any other world, and he was sure that neither Steve nor his mother knew what he knew about it.

By the time that his father's form emerged from the mist, his rage against Steve had quite died out, and also his curiosity over the puzzle of his non-appearance. His father came along the Pancoasts' fence, slowly, as if he were dragged out by the day's duties. His head leaned forward, his eyes were bent toward the ground, and a roll in his hand bumped negligently against the fence palings. He never looked up, not even when he reached the gate, merely fumbled at the latch and pushed his way in, as if he had resigned his will to habit in so much as he could. The boy slipped down from the fence and made himself felt; his father looked at him kindly, and asked in a tired voice: —

“Is that you, Jack? How did you like the opera?”

Jack did not answer. The sense of disappointment returned and choked him.

"You got home early. Did you stay for the last act?"

"Steve didn't come." He could find no more incisive words.

"What!" his father exclaimed, stopping and straightening himself. "I gave him the tickets this morning. What's happened to him?"

Jack shook his head, and the man took the boy's hand sympathetically, saying gently: —

"Well, I'll take you next week if I can get the tickets. Don't bother, and don't say anything to Steve. Perhaps he forgot all about it."

At first the boy was consoled, but at the last words, denying him just vengeance, he withdrew his hand. He knew why his father was trying to smooth it over, — just like Mary, — so that his mother shouldn't talk and get into one of her rages. A feeling almost of contempt for his father swept over him, and he said no more. He would take his own measures.

Together they proceeded to the back door of the house. It was a stucco-covered brick affair, and large patches of the stucco, colored and lined in imitation of sandstone blocks, were peeling off. The building was shedding its false skin; the ragged grass plots, the abandoned flower-beds, made it more unlovely.

"Ann's gone," the boy said, pregnantly, with a bitter desire to solace his burning resentment by chronicling misfortune. The man's shoulders stooped unconsciously.

"Mother said she was drunk and impudent," he continued, anxious to make an impression. "She sent her away. Ann swore and made a fuss."

It was not the first time that the old Irishwoman had been discharged from the Pemberton household. But after her sprees, when her too truthful tongue no longer wagged with liquor, she came back, and was forgiven. She was the only servant whom Mrs. Pemberton could keep, for she knew the family disagreements, and a new servant would have to learn them.

"The doctor's been here most half an hour," Jack continued, impartially; "and mother's gone to bed."

They had reached the back door, and Mr. Pemberton was not obliged to recognize the information. Jack followed his father into the house and waited to see what he would do in face of the bare dining-room table and the cluttered kitchen, which corroborated his story.

Mr. Pemberton opened the hall door noiselessly, deposited his roll of music, his hat and coat, and returned to the kitchen. Jack helped him as he had done so often on similar occasions, running to the cellar for kindling, getting the eggs and butter and bread from the pantry, buttering the toast after his father had prepared it. The boy said nothing. For the first time he was thinking of what they were doing,—of what it meant. At last, when the elements of a supper were ready, his father said: "Get me the tray, Jack, and go and call Mary."

Then selecting the best slice of toast, the best cup and saucer, and the silver cream-jug, Mr. Pemberton arranged the tray. As Jack went to call his sister, he could hear his father's soothing, somewhat timid voice, in the room above, and his mother's querulous answer. Instead of

calling Mary, he listened, the feeling of contempt again filling his heart. Soon there came a murmur of expostulating voices from the room above, and finally distinct, sharp sentences:—

“Steve would be all right if you did something for your family. He can’t have fit associates, living where we do and how we do. The nice boys at the Academy won’t go with him. A music teacher—”

“Is a pettifogging country lawyer, like your father was, any better?” the man’s voice flamed back with unusual spirit.

Jack retreated from the front hall and called out of the dining-room window, “Mary, Mary!” until his sister appeared at a gap in the fence.

CHAPTER II

STEVE did not appear the next day, nor was anything heard from him for two days thereafter.

Jack was not told this, but he knew it instinctively. The atmosphere of the house was ominous, something like what it had been when his little brother had died three years before. His mother remained in bed in her darkened room; his father and Mary and he prepared the desultory meals, maintaining a constrained silence. At first there had been loud, angry discussions in his mother's room above, followed by hysterical tears; and the doctor — a fashionably attired man, who was driven by a negro servant — came every day, a sure sign that the family crisis was important. Then Mary was taken into the confidence of her parents; attired in her best church dress she disappeared into the town on mysterious errands. She could not be induced to divulge these, and she wore perpetually an air of secret and responsible grief that irritated the thirteen-year-old boy. Their father and Jack wished to eat in the kitchen, as the most labor-saving method, but Mary, who was nearly fifteen, was loyal to the prejudices of both sides of the family, and insisted upon setting the table in the dining room and presiding in her mother's place with funereal gravity, alternating with feeble sallies of conventional remarks.

During this interregnum Jack had unusual freedom. He had taken advantage of his freedom once to stray from the neighborhood into the busy "square," where he bought some candy and cigarettes, as he had seen Steve do, but this one excursion satisfied him except for surreptitious visits to old man Cliff's market garden that stretched in green furrows behind the Pemberton hen-house. These excursions were made less in the desire of loot from the Cliff strawberry beds than in the hope of finding little Isabelle Mather in the old pavilion at the farther end of the Cliff garden. General Mather's estate stretched from this humble quarter of the town up the long slope of a gentle hill to the family mansion,—the most considerable house in Riverside, as the Mathers were the most considerable family. Mrs. Pemberton had once exchanged calls with Mrs. Mather, and to this day, years after Mrs. Mather's death, the Mathers were ever on Mrs. Pemberton's tongue. For that reason Jack might have avoided the Mather place, but having found one summer day the abandoned pavilion, and recognizing its favorable position as a depository for his loot, as well as a tranquil retreat from storms, he had made of it a nest during the summer while the great wooden house on the hill was shut. There, one day in the early autumn, he had been surprised by the young daughter of the people on the hill, a tall, fair girl, and this chance acquaintance, made as child with child, instead of driving him from his retreat, rendered it the more attractive. Isabelle Mather was eleven to his thirteen, and yet her calm manners, her deep, tranquil eyes, and gentle voice gave her the

advantage of age. She came and went from the Riverside house, — now to the seaside or the mountains, again to visit in New York, — leading altogether a strangely pleasant existence of variety which the boy envied her.

Lately he had seen her across Cliff's rhubarb beds strolling sedately near the pavilion, and he had carefully concealed the fact of her return from Mary, who had fluttering ambitions of a girlish sort toward Isabelle. So when these days of interregnum came, and his heart was heavy with the sultry imminence of some unknown crisis, he had tried clumsily to tell Isabelle Mather of the other world which puzzled him, to see whether she had any knowlege of this double certainty, feeling assured that in her larger experience the girl must have opportunities denied to him. He told her, then, of the lost opera, of his dream of what it would have been. But the young girl looked at him coldly; her blue eyes had the glitter of winter water.

"Oh! it was very bad, papa said — it's lots nicer in New York and Paris."

Forgetting this rebuff, he went at the thing again and stumbled on unhappy phrases.

"I don't understand," she answered primly, with a little shade of disdain on her delicate face. The boy read the child's reserve: "She doesn't want to be intimate with me — they have told her not to see me."

His rapid surmise was met by her next remark: "I don't think you should come here this way through the fence. It isn't — nice; you should come to the house like our other friends."

Jack's face turned very red.

"I don't want to go to your house like your other friends!"

The little girl arranged her muslin skirt as she answered haughtily: —

"Roger says it isn't manly to sneak into people's grounds, and Roger says —"

But catching sight of the boy's expression, she paused. Jack laughed disagreeably.

"Tell your brother I don't care what he thinks. He's like Steve, I guess," he added with final contempt.

"Don't say that!" the girl replied more gently. "I am sorry — I," — her lips trembled, — "I like you, and I want to hear — oh! Don't go that way!"

But in spite of this appeal he had turned his back with a boy's brusqueness. She ran after him a few steps, and then recollecting her admirable manners, she stopped and called regretfully: "Do come again, once more. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

From the Cliff side of the fence Jack could see her walking up the gravelled path, a dainty aristocrat, moving with instinctive precision and indifference to things animate. The boy watched her, his heart angry and sad. She might have been unlike the others! And he learned from her the lesson of caste — the first and most insidious poison that drops into a child's heart. This was what his mother fussed over. But instead of sympathizing with her longings, he hated Isabelle and all the Mathers, and withdrew into the unfurnished world of his imagination.

For years the muslin-clad figure of the child, with her

hard, beautiful blue eyes and dainty-mannered air, stood in his mind for the world — the world of other people — which his heart refused hotly to accept.

These days of Steve's disappearance Jack had given up going to school, not in defiance of authority, but from the consciousness of disturbed conditions, of impending change. And the gloomy atmosphere of his household fascinated him strangely. The other world, to be sure, was far away, but the present one did not exist any more; it was neither one thing nor the other — merely a void condition that must precede some convulsion, like the sultry, brooding moments that intervene between the wind and the rain of a severe thunderstorm. A time for much speculation, and laborious endeavors to understand! The first passionate contempt for his father for not rendering him justice, for submitting to degrading conditions of family servitude, wore away, and the boy began to feel a kind of pity for the stooping, gray-haired man, whose irresolute, dragging steps along the cinder path beside the Pancoast fence as he went away in the morning or came back at night on his round of lesson-giving, sounded of defeat. Jack did not know what defeat meant; he thought of it as a complete surrender to the ordinary world of things — the rotting peach tree, the untidy yard, the scaling stucco, the shabby mal-adjusted house. And he wondered if this portentous change would make it impossible for *him* too to escape from what men called real — if it would mean a complete and eternal fixing of the sordid world as it was.

This ignorant pity for his father made him kinder and more helpful. He ran errands, cooked what he could, and refrained from announcing disagreeable items of news, such as the doctor's frequent visits. The fifth day there came a change in the gloomy house; a letter arrived,—he saw Mary carry it upstairs,—and, later, his mother came down, dressed in a black gown, and scolded him for not being at school. Mary would say nothing about the letter, but a breath of action blew through the house. There was a stormy discussion in the evening between his father and his mother, and his father walked to the telegraph office late at night. The next day Jack went to school, but he could not read a word; he was wondering what was going on at home. When, on his return, he entered the dining room, he heard voices in his father's music room, which Steve was allowed to use for a study since he attended the Academy. There was a strange woman's voice—a deep bass that he had heard before, but could not remember where. At last, at the risk of being snubbed, he pushed open the door and crept into the music room.

Steve was there; as Jack entered, Steve winked at him. By his side sat a large, fair-skinned woman dressed tidily in a black gown with silk ribbons on her bonnet. His father stood by the mantelpiece, his head bowed in his hand. His mother sat very stiff and cold opposite Steve. The stranger was saying:—

“Well, if it hain't been for your tele-gram, I said to John we'd better let the boy stay at the farm and work out his keep. John was going to write that to Arthur but —”

"I don't know what Mr. Pemberton might do," his mother interrupted, in her rapid staccato tones. "But I should never consent. I don't want my boy brought up on a farm and educated as a clodhopper. We have had enough farming in the family, I should think."

The large woman tossed her head at the sneer in the last words, and retorted:—

"Well, folks as can't keep their children contented at home —"

"Mr. Pemberton," Jack's mother interrupted angrily, "will you stand there and hear your sister-in-law insult your wife!"

"Julia," his father began deprecatingly, raising his hand. And at the name there flashed into the boy's mind a distant memory of a visit to a little white house, a journey made by steamboat, a green country, and a large cheerful woman, whom his mother seemed to dislike especially,—his Aunt Julia. How did Steve and Aunt Julia come together! In his excitement he walked up to his aunt's side, and his presence became known to his mother.

"Go right out, Jack!" she exclaimed crossly. "What are you sneaking in here for!" And as Jack still lingered, she rose nervously to lay hands on him.

"What's the matter, Sarah?" his aunt interposed in her broad, guttural speech. "Jock's all right; he wants to see his aunt,—more'n the rest of you seem to."

As no one ventured a remark, the boy said impulsively:—

"I wish you'd ask *me* to go stay with you, Aunt Julia,

if mother don't want Steve to go. She won't care if you take me! I'd like to live on the farm."

His excited mind already suggested that this might be the great event which had been in the air these days. His mother had often said in her accesses of bad temper that he was "just a Pemberton over again," and had even threatened to make his father send him away to the country.

In the enthusiasm of his desire he felt, nevertheless, the depressed sinking of his father's head upon his hand, as if some one had suddenly given him an unexpected blow. His mother's lips drew together as she ejaculated, "Heartless!"

"Thinks the same way as Steve, it appears," his Aunt Julia remarked maliciously, still holding Jack's hand. "Couldn't hardly get Steve to the station this morning."

So Steve had been all these days at Aunt Julia's! Very far away in Pemberton Neck beyond Portland. The sense of mystery grew, and Jack gripped his aunt's hand tighter. She kept on, having the evident advantage: —

"Arthur, what do you say? John and I want a boy about. We ain't had any children, and we ain't like city folks — we always *wanted* 'em. Let us take Jock now, leastwise for a time."

Her voice was conciliatory, almost pleading, and the boy felt the tension of the moment in the stuffy, furnace-heated room. It was no longer a question of Steve, of the injury to him in the opera matter, but of his own fate that was to be decided by the next words. His

mother broke in excitedly: she always carried everything in a whirlwind before sober people had a chance to weigh their ideas!

"Mr. Pemberton, will you not speak? Will you let your sister-in-law entice your children away from their homes before your face?"

His father lifted his head with a certain weary dignity.

"I think, Sarah, if the boys feel as they do, perhaps it shows — that it would be best for them to go."

Jack did not quite understand what his father meant. It never occurred to him that going away with Aunt Julia meant abandoning his family. There was no time for working the matter out in detail; his mother's tempestuous tongue had broken loose once more: —

"That's like the Pembertons and the Maxwells — no more spirit than barn-mice! What if the boys do want to run away? Whose fault is it? If you had given them a chance to take their place with nice people, if you gave them any advantages —"

Mr. Pemberton waved his hand distractedly, and Aunt Julia came to his rescue.

"Well, Sarah, don't go over that story again. We hain't the time. I guess Arthur has done as well by his family as most. Steve is going to the Academy, isn't he?"

Thereupon Mrs. Pemberton poured out her wrath upon the placid, florid woman, and there was a jangle of family charges, until Aunt Julia, releasing her grasp of Jack's hand, rose and said: —

"I hain't called on to hear such business! I'll get that five o'clock train, Arthur, for Boston. How about that money the boys took —"

At this juncture, Jack was pushed out of the room. Not until years after did he learn all the details of Steve's flight, — how he and another boy had taken some bills from the cash drawer in the store kept by the boy's father, and after going to the opera and spending most of the money in forbidden pleasures, had started for Pemberton Neck with the remaining dollars. There they had arrived two days later, footsore, penniless, and jubilant, expecting a warm welcome from Uncle John and Aunt Julia.

When Jack was thrust from the room, his hopes somewhat dashed, he took refuge in the dining room, where Mary was setting the table very elaborately, as for guests. "I'm going back with Aunt Julia," he announced to Mary importantly, and Mary looked at him in astonishment and then cried a few feeble tears. Aunt Julia, however, left the house without even asking to see him again, refusing point blank to sit down "in such a scolding family." Mary had all the labor of putting back the best china in the parlor closet, and setting the table over again more simply.

At first it seemed to him that the crisis had come to nothing, that the ensuing vacuum was worse than the old condition. But there was a change, perceptible to his awakened senses, and the change was due to his own impulsive words. Steve and Mary, severally and together, when they wished to snub him, accused him of

disloyalty, of cruelly wounding their father and mother. And as he pondered on the scene in the study, and gathered up the bitter words let fall at the table or in the heat of argument between his parents, he came to see that the crisis had really taken place, — that these older people, with their larger freedom, their opportunities, had seen clearly, cruelly, the wreck of this family life. Perhaps for the first time both had understood what it meant, their perpetual wrangling, and accusation, and discontent: with the elements of their experience they had created this unreal world, — unlovely, harsh, sordid, — out of which the young beings sprung from their loins had wished to flee, as the vine reaches up from shade to light. And they saw that their world of discord existed, once created: *they* could never build it afresh.

CHAPTER III

THE little scene in the study marked the beginning of the end in the music-teacher's family. For months thereafter the jarring tempers of the household were more subdued: in their place succeeded a sour silence as of despair. From this time the boy began to piece together the fragments of talk that had hitherto fallen on unheeding ears. Little by little he learned certain facts about the family. His father's people had been poor farmers in a seacoast village of Maine, and his mother never let her children forget that she had been a Russell, third cousin of the Burton Russells; that her father had been the leading lawyer of Coffin's Falls; and that her brother was the pastor of the largest church in that New Hampshire town. Years later, when the boy saw for the first time the "Russell place," a neat little house on the outskirts of Coffin's Falls, with its own little drive and stable, he failed to perceive the magnitude of difference that in his mother's eyes had separated the family of Pemberton Neck from the family of Coffin's Falls. His youthful imagination had pictured the prim little wooden house as an opulent brick mansion lying in the midst of ancestral acres.

The other triumphs of the Russells also lost their glamour as he grew to know the world. The case before

the Supreme Court at Washington, the term in the New Hampshire legislature, the visit to some New York Russells,—isolated points of bravery in a prolonged term of Coffin's Falls,—were a meagre enough glory. Even the two years in the Boston boarding school, where his mother had met his father, did not indicate a position of grandeur. However petty these differences might seem to Jack, years later, they were vital to the disappointed woman, and accepted by her family. Her husband had agreed to them, and that was most essential.

About his father the information gathered at this period was less fruitful. Beyond the taunt of being a farmer's son, a "clodhopper," there was little to learn concerning Mr. Pemberton or his family. It was unsafe to mention the Pembertons in the house on clear days. Aunt Julia, a woman from Prince Edward Island, of immediate English extraction, was ridiculed as illiterate and boorish. His father never mentioned the Pembertons in public. Surreptitiously, when less heavy-hearted than usual, he would speak to Jack of Pemberton Neck, of the sweet-smelling northern woods, the cold black seas; the boy learned to drop these reminiscences when his mother appeared, as he learned to shuffle out of sight an old copy of Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* when asked on Sundays if he had by heart his collect and epistle.

But before his father died he heard the story of the great effort the Pemberton family had made, years earlier, to thrust its one aspiring member into prominence,—of the two years at a country college, the ambitions in music, the glorious days of early success in

Boston, the dreams of foreign study,—put aside by a hasty marriage after a three-months' acquaintance, and finally abandoned as the cares of life overtook the buoyant young man one by one and laid hands on his aspiring march. Once, on an occasion when Mrs. Pemberton was away from the house, his father had even dug out some old manuscripts and had consented to play over the forgotten strains of his cantata, — *The Song of Solomon*. The yellowed sheets bent limply in the piano rack; Jack had held them, while his father, first stumbling over the dim notes, then gathering courage and memory, swept on through the mazes of his ancient dream. The boy never forgot that perception of his father. The bowed head straightened, the faded blue eyes flashed and then closed; the years of sordid care, of miserable incapacity before life, slipped away; and he played as a young man with the visions of the cities of youth stretched before him. No music that Jack was to hear would ever have the peculiar poignancy, the grandiose beauty of that unfinished cantata. Suddenly it came to an abrupt end, as if the manuscript had been torn across by some ignorant hand.

"I was going to London, when it was finished," Mr. Pemberton had said quietly in explanation. And the boy had sense enough not to probe farther.

On this occasion he had seen also copies of published compositions,—songs and waltzes, adaptations of oratorios, arrangements for church music,—a thick sheaf in all. The sheets bore old dates and the names of forgotten publishers.

"They do these things better now," Mr. Pemberton said, throwing the music back into the drawer from which he had unearthed it.

"Why don't you write some new ones?" Jack asked.

"I haven't anything to say — leastwise what is lifting, and the world wants only lifting things, Jack."

Jack understood.

Yet his father remained to him for years afterward a mystery. He knew that earlier the family prospects had been much brighter; at first his father had had an organ in a church near Boston. And even when for some reason he had moved to this smaller town, where he was chief organist in the place, there had been more money, more ease, than now. Pupils had come to him from the surrounding towns, and he had been accounted a successful teacher. Latterly they had fallen off, and he had been obliged to take a smaller place as organist, for his wife had offended the people of the old church, and had sent away some of his best pupils in a huff. Now, each year revealed the further disintegration of his affairs. Yet even the boy knew that these obvious facts did not explain. There was a secret mystery of character, some fundamentally sapping decay of tissue, — of old standing, but recent manifestations. Even the boy felt that a sound-looking ship does not founder at the first blows of the waves, crumbling from one shock into the sea. Beneath the fair decks and stout masts there must be rotting timber, which had undone the ship before it sailed from port.

With this sense of mystery about his father's career,

this inexplicable failure before the common trials of life, the boy grew to have a special knowledge and affection for the man. Throughout his life he would see the weary, dragging figure as it came along the Pancoasts' fence, its fallen shoulders, its untidy shock of gray hair, its long arms with bent, tapering fingers, and the face that never smiled, but seemed always blind. He would see, also, the upthrown head, the strong body movements, when the man played the cantata. Thus his father was curiously two persons,—a man of youth and a man of age. And their relations were likewise double. For he felt sure that his father had known the other world, perhaps even better than he had. The cantata seemed a pure burst of light from the beautiful skies of that silent land. But, somehow, inexplicably, the man had become involved in what people called real, and had let those ugly facts reported by the common senses of man get hold of him, until the boy doubted if he ever wholly escaped from them now. Father and son never discussed the matter, but words let fall as they worked together in the kitchen, mornings and evenings, washing dishes, preparing toast or broiling meat, made the boy sure it had not always been with the man's soul as it was now.

The dissolution of the Pemberton family took three years. During this time Jack was attending the public school; there was no money to send him to the Academy as Steve had been sent. He detested his school life. He was shabbily dressed, usually in clothes too small for his large frame, and the boys he would have liked to know drew away from him, as if warned at home of his

social degeneracy. He had shot up into a large, black-haired, brown-skinned youth, — “a clodhopper Pemberton,” his mother said, — and he cursed his lengthening shadow for its ungainly appearance.

The shabby, shrunken clothes were not so much the cause of his loneliness as the gradual social descent of the family. The aristocracy of the town was formed by the faculties of the Academy and of the Theological Seminary, together with a few large mill-owners, all of whom lived on the “Hill.” That the Pembertons had slipped from their first uncertain position with these hill people was due, so Mrs. Pemberton reiterated, to the fact that Mr. Pemberton persisted in keeping the Pancoast Lane house. There had been talk for years of moving up the hill away from the humbler trades-people of the lane. This subject had been the seed of much family strife. As the Pembertons were usually behind with their rent, and rents were much higher on the hill, they had never left Pancoast’s Lane. Latterly, even Mrs. Pemberton had given up agitating the question.

The last hope of social rehabilitation had been Steve. He had been sent to the Academy, and furnished with smart clothes. He was a pretty, pert boy, and he grew to be a pretty young man of a common American type, with glossy blond hair that he brushed smooth and parted in the middle, pretty red cheeks and brown eyes, and a little curling brown mustache. His coloring was Russell, his mother said, and his form not too heavy to be Russell also. His beauty was of a chromo type that was very seductive to young women, and he had begun

to "have girls" before he was sixteen. Unfortunately he gravitated toward the more common families of the valley, where he was very popular. When he was seventeen, having failed to pass from one class to another, he left the Academy, and made up his mind that he would go into business. Thereupon he loafed about the town for several months, getting into various small scrapes of a vulgar kind; then he entered a mill as a clerk. He became very "dressy," and smoked cigars. It was known that he had been drunk once or twice. His mother, who hoped now that he might make money, helped out his small salary with occasional five-dollar bills, scolded from her husband, and contrived to hide his cheap little excesses.

The five-dollar bills were harder and harder to get, even after the shrillest outbursts, the fiercest taunts, for the music teacher was laboring hard, pressed on all sides, breathing heavily, with the bloodshot eyes of the human animal in his last covert. Ann, the servant, never came back. Mary and Jack and their father did most of the housework. The old corduroy-covered furniture accumulated holes and grease spots; nothing was renewed. Finally the music teacher dragged himself home one day and lay down on the sofa-bed in the study: he never got up again. The doctor came and said things, and Mary went for the medicines. But Jack, when he returned from school and saw his father lying motionless beside the window, his face turned to the wall, knew that the end of the crisis was coming.

For a week Mrs. Pemberton did not come downstairs,

convinced that this reported sickness was sulkiness or laziness. Finally, the doctor went upstairs, and said some brutal things before leaving the house. Then she went downstairs and looked at the sick man. As she entered the room, he turned his head to the wall, as if to dodge a blow or to gather his courage for an impending assault. But she was tamed by the doctor's words, — the doctor who had been her old ally, her one thread of connection with the Hill, — and for the six weeks that her husband lived thereafter she nursed him in a kind of exaltation, of romantic devotion, with tears and smothered exclamations, as she had married him nineteen years before. All of which feeling he seemed to take gratefully, much to Jack's disgust. The boy was bitter and passionate for his father, who had spent his spirit and was cravenly resigned. Jack wanted to take his mother and thrust her out of the room, hissing at her, "Too late, too late. No acting here. Go to church and weep, and order your *crêpe bonnet*. This man must *die* in peace!"

She felt the boy's antagonism, and rebuked it by sending him on long errands with useless letters to the doctor, thus keeping him out of the sick-room as much as possible. Toward the end, however, he had to be allowed to stay with the sick man while other members of the family were busy or slept. One such occasion, — it was dusk of a fine April day, — he sat by the open window, watching the unearthly fog steal like enchantment over the Pancoast garden, blotting out the dusty wooden cottages of the lane and the freshly budding

cherry trees. His father had not spoken for hours, but he rarely said anything lately, merely moved his hand and pointed for what he wanted. The misty landscape was stealing hypnotic fingers over the boy, when he heard his father's voice say feebly : —

“ Jack ! ”

“ Yes, sir. ”

“ Come here. ”

Jack put the window down and went over to the bedside.

“ You remember the music ? ”

Jack nodded, a lump in his throat.

“ Get it out of the drawer. ”

Jack obeyed, his hands trembling as they fumbled among the cluttered contents of the deep drawer. He found the yellowed sheets rolled up and tied with a piece of twine, and put them on the bed beside his father's hand. The long, bony, hairy fingers, unnaturally whitened by illness, stretched out and took the sheets, and brought them near the eyes. He could not read the notes.

“ You can't play it, ” his father said, with a sigh.

The boy half groaned. His mother had forbidden his learning to play any instrument, not wishing her sons to follow their father's footsteps.

“ Well, then, burn them. ” And as the boy still hesitated, averse thus to wipe out the last record of his father's might, the sick man said irritably, “ Burn them at once, ” and shoved the pages off the bed.

Jack took the loose sheets to the fireplace and touched

a match to them. His father raised himself slightly and looked at the flaming paper until the wan, powdery ashes swirled up the chimney. The sudden flame lit up his bristly face and bony arms. A grotesque figure, an irony of life, a triumph of the real!

The boy shuddered unconsciously. His father said weakly, after the flames had died down:—

“Come here. I want to say something.”

Jack obeyed, kneeling by the bedside to catch the faint tones of the fading voice.

“Remember, Jack,” his father whispered, “your time is coming to choose — temptation — older —”

The feeble tones died out, and the head sank back as if too exhausted to shape the wandering thoughts of a sick mind into intelligible words. Perhaps, feeling at the very end the inutility of speech, the final feebleness of the best chosen words, he had given over the desire to explain, to exhort, and resigned his son to life.

When Jack saw that his father had changed his mind, he went back to his chair by the window, haunted by the mystery of this life that was dying out so close to him, wondering what that message to him might have been, baffled as of old by his perception of the wanton wreck that life had made. The mist had shut in thick and white about the house, cutting off the cherry trees not ten feet from the window, hemming in the silent room in a great waste of the unknown. The phenomena of the world, — those that he shared with others, — the streets, the houses, the fences, the furniture of life, with their common angular aspects, slipped away like sand

running through the fingers. There was left a void, — enveloping, awful, consolatory, — out of which sounded the past, as sounds the gurgle of rushing waters in the ears of the diver. The world that others saw did not exist, nor as yet another world, mere strangeness . . .

“Jack!” He heard his mother’s voice, with a new note in it. “Your father is dead!”

She shrieked and fell sobbing beside the inert form.

Jack rose from his chair, stumbled as in a dark and whirling room of unfamiliar things. He saw the white, exhausted face of the sleeping man. And the boy was silent, — strangely content that it should be so.

CHAPTER IV

"WHY don't you cry?" Mary demanded impatiently between two sobs. "You haven't cried once since father died, and mother says you're heartless."

Jack looked at the girl resentfully out of his burning eyes and left the room. He could not endure the general tears of the household. Even Steve, who had kept away from the sick-room much of the time, had red eyes these days and a broken voice. Jack knew that they all despised him, even his Uncle Talbot, who had been summoned from Coffin's Falls by his mother, and her cousin, Anne Russell, who had also felt bound to respond to the family call. They did not perceive as he did the hideousness of loud lamentations over this soothing passing from a grim unreality to a gentle unreality. The dead man, he knew, would feel as he felt. The others missed, as they had always missed, the right interpretation of things. They might at least leave him alone to struggle with the besetting shades of life, to gain some *terra firma* of reality! Since that misty April night when he had listened for his father's last words, he had been drifting in a sea of sleep, clutching now and again at a thought that promised support.

When Aunt Julia and Uncle John arrived, he had felt sympathy with their sober, repressed grief. Their pres-

ence divided the little house of mourning into two camps : the Russells were laboriously courteous and distant, and the two old country people were evidently ill at ease. Jack noticed the division and openly joined the weaker party, spending his time with them, scarcely speaking to his mother's relatives. He knew that the Russells looked at his shabby clothes and commented on his table-manners, and condoled with his mother over him as one of her evident trials. At the family council, held shortly after the funeral, he was excluded ; he learned from Mary's remarks that his fate had been settled by a high-handed edict. He was to accompany his mother and Mary to Coffin's Falls and find a place there in some store. Steve was to remain in his present place until the Russell influence could be exerted toward obtaining a better position in Boston or New York.

"I won't go," Jack announced to Mary, unpassionately. "If the family is like *him*, I don't want to live in the same town with 'em." And careless of Mary's protests, he went to seek out his Aunt Julia and Uncle John.

"Aunt Julia," he demanded, "will you take me back with you? It won't be long before I can earn my living, and I can help Uncle John. If you don't —"

But his threat was never uttered, for the dumpy old Englishwoman replied in her soft, rolling utterance: "Why, Jock, your uncle and I thought maybe you'd come to us, but your mother's folks were so sot agin it and mortal proud that John got in a huff and wouldn't say a word."

The boy closed his lips doggedly, and said no more to

his aunt. When the Reverend Talbot Russell entered the room, Jack turned to him.

"I'm going to Maine with my uncle and aunt, Uncle Talbot," he announced without parley.

"You're very abrupt, my boy," the tall clergyman answered, an icy smile creeping over his waxy face. "That is not the way to reject the kind offices of your relatives, who offer you the advantages of life."

But he made no further objections to Jack's decision. Doubtless he argued that there would be one less unfortunate for the Russells to protect, and that a lad with such loutish instincts as to prefer these illiterate people to the society of Coffin's Falls would scarce become a source of family pride.

So it was arranged that after Jack had helped to pack the furniture of the Pancoast Lane house he was to take the coast steamboat from Boston and follow his aunt and uncle to Pemberton Neck. These were not pleasant days: his mother and Steve let him see how wanting in "family feeling" he had shown himself. They taunted him with the homeliness of the farmer-folk whose lot he had chosen. The boy was made to feel that he was abandoning his caste in the world and wilfully sinking to a low level—the level of neighbor Cliff, or, worse, old man Cliff's hired man,—dirty, tobacco-chewing Mike. Isabelle Mather would avoid him more than ever! But Jack held his tongue, and worked away stolidly at the barrels and boxes.

This tearing to pieces of the home—the only habita-

tion he had ever known — was a grim dismemberment of some stage-scene. The play that had been enacted there could never be repeated. The boy was somehow glad of that: it had been a gloomy mistake. None the less was it a solemn thing to dismember this past, to lay away the broken elements of what had been. These household things once dislodged and scattered, the last signs of that little world which his people took for real, in which his life had been set, would pass like smoke into the vast heavens. As he worked, he thought of his father, — he knew not where, — and he was sure that *he* was content to have the painful scene through which he had toiled, dispersed.

The last night he was summoned from the kitchen, where he was tying together pots and kettles, to the denuded dining room. Steve and Mary were sitting on the barrels and boxes. His mother had been crying.

"John," she sobbed, "you can go to-morrow morning with us as far as Boston — since you have made up your mind to *abandon* your family."

Jack's jaw dropped sullenly. He hated the injustice of woman's logic.

"You're a great fool, Jack, to leave your mother and sister," Steve added, "and go down there with those people."

"I guess you don't want me much!" Jack retorted defensively.

"How can you say that!" Mary exclaimed tearfully.

"I always said you were a Pemberton — or a Maxwell." (The Maxwells were his father's mother's people,

a degree lower in Mrs. Pemberton's estimation than the Pembertons.)

"I'm glad I am a Pemberton," Jack answered hotly. He did not know what it was to be a Pemberton, but he wished to strike out in loyalty to his father. "And I don't see as Steve is doing such an awful lot for you or Mary."

Steve cast one contemptuous glance at the boy, and rolled his cigar between his lips.

"Some day you'll see the mistake—you'll wish you weren't a clodhopper."

"I won't be a clodhopper," the boy answered sullenly, with a quick resolve to justify his choice.

As they went to bed, Jack shyly pulled his sister into his room, and said to her:—

"I didn't mean you, Mary. I'm sorry I shan't be with *you*."

"But you trouble mother so!" Mary responded severely.

The next morning, however, Mary went out to the Cliffs' garden and brought in a rose that she persisted in pinning to the lapel of Jack's abbreviated coat. Mary was punctilious about the sentiments. When they were on the train for Boston, Mrs. Pemberton put aside the thick veil she had drawn over her face, and called Jack to her.

"Here is a prayer-book and hymnal," she said, with a choking voice. "I hope you'll attend your own church, and not that meeting-house where the Pembertons go."

These were the last words that he remembered after-

wards his mother had spoken to him. Then he had merely slipped the little books into his pocket with a feeling of nausea at the religious counsel. What was religion good for, if it did not make people gentler, kinder? And he had never seen it do that in his home. Later, when experience had led him a little farther into the secrets of his family life, he regarded these words more tolerantly, trying to understand the curious relation that religion has to the conduct of a woman like his mother. That night, as he stood on the deck of the steamboat and watched the harbor lights wink dimly in the spring fog, he tried to think what was really true. Was he heartless in resolving to leave his mother and Mary? He was sorry to leave Mary,—he was sure of that,—and later he might be sorry to have left his mother. But just now the solace of loneliness was infinite. That curious panorama that people had called his world for sixteen years was fading into the gloom, as the buildings of the retreating city shrouded themselves in the night. That was not real, could not be real, the boy told himself. The only real thing had been his father, and he, too, had gone, half-explained, a sweetly sad puzzle. He was left, pushing on like this vessel into the damp, dark sea beyond the land. . . .

Early the next morning he roused himself in the stuffy air of the lower cabin. Picking his way among the prostrate, snoring figures that were scattered over the floor, he went on deck. The boat was slowly steaming up the coast between green islands. The sun that had barely peeped above the horizon had not burned away the morning mist,

which hung in huge, fantastic wreaths over the wooded shores and bathed the vessel in gleaming dew. The air was soft and damp; the water, which the blunt prow cut almost without a ripple, was cold and black. Little dusky-edged waves from the wake of the steamer nibbled the rocky shores of the islands.

No one was stirring except the silent pilot in the wheel-house, who from time to time with an apparent unconsciousness moved the electric indicator under his hand, as one by one the landmarks of the course came into view. When the mist rose higher on the land, there emerged green fields surrounding white cottages, with sometimes a rude granite pier. The early cocks hailed the boat; their jubilant notes rang with strange familiarity across the silent water. Far away to the south the rays of a belated light vied with the beams of the sun. The steamboat passed on, sweeping in graceful curves from thoroughfare to thoroughfare, silent except for the human respiration of its boiler, steadily cleaving its way in the still morning into the voiceless lands of the future.

As the sun rose higher, the resinous perfume from the fir-covered islands floated out to the expectant boy, and he breathed deeply the spicy wine of the north coast. The sun drove the fog-wreaths higher and higher up the hills behind the islands, until they rested in the dimpled surfaces of their crests. These hills, bathed in purple to their feet which touched the water, their heads crowned with the white fog, impressive in their morning loveliness, were the most beautiful things the boy had ever seen. Purple and gold and white and green, the forest-covered

coast hills marched, step by step, to the unclouded sky above! This, Jack thought, had been his father's home. He seemed to feel him standing by his side, his chest heaving with the large air of his youth, his head erect to the hills,—as he had seen him once when he played over his old cantata. In the still morning air the triumphant notes of the *Song of Solomon* floated out from the spice-laden islands, filling the cool emptiness of the spacious sea with its longing and hope.

"There's Pemberton Neck," the pilot said to the boy, leaning out of his open window as the steamboat swung around the black nose of a little island into an open bay.

The merest ruffle of the wind stirred the waters, sending a white streak like teeth upon the island's shore. The chill black water threw off a scent of the ocean that cut the warm spice of the firs. Across the bay, immediately in the path of the steamboat, a finger of land curved out to the ocean. Jack gazed entranced at the dim line of rocks that marked it off from the sea. There had been his father's home; his, now, where life was to be made.

CHAPTER V

A YELLOW map of the county, dated 1850, hung in the tiny hall of the Pemberton house. Its broad surface enlarged the little section of Maine coast to the proportions of a German kingdom. Jack studied every inch of it, tracing out the bays that cut like long fingers into the land, following the rambling roads as they wound around the heads of the bays, across the hills, and finally disappeared into the adjacent counties. Every householder of that date had his name and homestead indicated upon the map. Along the shore of Green Bay, the east defence of which was the curving peninsula of Pemberton Neck, the Pemberton name appeared again and again, with various combinations of initials. Near the head waters of the bay, in the little town of Pemberton Mills, and along the lower course of Parker's River, the Pembertons were as thick as blueberries in their pastures.

"Most died out or moved away," Uncle John remarked succinctly, adding: "The land hereabouts used to belong mostly to the Pembertons or Maxwells, but in them days there was shippin' up Parker's River, and the Mills was an outfitted port for fishermen."

The Pembertons that were left were "of no account," "run out," as Aunt Julia, who was a foreigner, placidly

admitted. Most of them that had had farms on the Neck had been glad to sell their rocky acres to city people when the first wave of summer immigration had reached Green Hill Bay twenty years before. Up country there were a few left, digging their stony farms in summer and fishing in winter. Old Judge Pemberton, who had been in Congress just after the war, still kept his grandfather's house at the Mills, and occasionally in summer some of his family came from Philadelphia and opened the old house. They were very distantly connected with Jack's branch of the family. Cousin Hadley Pemberton, over on the east side of the Neck, had been shrewd enough not to sell all his shore farm. In one corner he had put up a long, rambling, thin wooden hotel, that even the northeasters had not subdued to harmonious tints, and he was said to be making money. He had some of the best "points" of the shore still in his possession, which he was holding for fabulous prices.

For the rest, the Pembertons had been rubbed off the map in the last thirty years, or had grown poorer and poorer, as the tide of affairs set more swiftly away from Green Bay. A group of the country people could scarcely gather in the store at Pemberton Mill without containing one or more of these weaker offshoots of the family tree. Bent, rugged, with knotty hands and uncouth feet, slow and timid, — these were the "clodhoppers" for whom Jack's mother had had her taunts.

Jack was known among them from the first as "Arthur's boy," and after he left the store these distant

relatives went over his father's story again and again as follows:—

"Ain't exactly like Arthur."

"Arthur didn't do very well."

"He was a smart boy, but soft with the girls."

"I hear his wife thought an awful sight of herself."

"Wouldn't have nothin' to do with John and Julia."

"Arthur didn't get much, marryin' that woman."

"Music feller, weren't he?"

And so forth, until some unknown spirit moved and separated the party.

These uncouth, poverty-betraying figures explained a good deal to Jack of his mother's and sister's feelings of social difference. Even the dingy house on Pancoast's Lane was not like the close little frame cottages—an attic above two rooms—that Maine farmers lived in.

John Pemberton's house was of this type; the broad, two-story, square farmhouse of the Massachusetts country, which Jack had expected to find, did not exist in Maine, except as an occasional instance of wealth in the villages, such as Judge Pemberton's brick mansion. But Aunt Julia, of thrifty Yorkshire descent, gave the little farm at Parker's River an air of comfort. The cottage glistened with white paint; the sweet-pea vines rioted in the thin soil; and the barn had a salty cleanness and freshness about it. There was not much farming,—a cow, a horse, some hens, a pig, a few fields pied with daisies and buttercups to till, and a salt meadow. Uncle John made his living out of the stone quarry over the hill beside the bay, and out of his old schooner, the

Julia P., that lay up in the cove by the bridge. Past years he had fished off the Banks, but since one spring he had returned from Prince Edward Island with Aunt Julia, he had given up venturesome pursuits, and taken more assiduously to the stone quarry.

He was a little man with a red bunch of a beard hanging from his chin, an untidy bald head, and eyes set in furrowed wrinkles. He had welcomed Jack, not demonstratively, but kindly; for deep in his heart he had kept warm his admiration and loyalty for the brilliant older brother, in whose behalf the family had spent their little hoard years ago. He taught Jack to split the rough blocks of Belgian pavement that were piled up beside the bay for shipment in the fall. Days at a time the two sat under a rude shelter of an old sail stretched over a wooden frame, and clipped, clipped at the native rock, silent, with a passive sympathy for one another. Or the boy helped the old fisherman with his lobster-pots, learning to know the sea in its unruffled moods at dawn. During the summer season Jack was sent to the hotel and the cottages on the Neck with lobsters or vegetables or milk. These excursions into the strangers' lively world were the least tolerable tasks of the year; for in spite of all his good sense, he felt that he was justifying Steve and his mother in their sneers. The back doors of the cottages, the hired servants who chaffed him, stirred a pride that he despised in himself, but could not conquer.

For the most part, however, existence was calm, pleasantly empty of events, colored by sensations of the clear, dry atmosphere and spicy woods and salt water. The

mechanical labor of the stone-shed and the lobster sloop dulled his mind and soothed the vigor of his strong limbs. The silent meals with his uncle and aunt were never dreary. It was a peaceful, monotonous period when nature was unfolding her plant robustly, unconsciously. As the summer waned, there was less to do; and fine afternoons Jack could tramp over the country after game, or sail across the bay to the purple hills which had lifted up his soul the day he came. He learned to know the woods in their most revealing time, the brooding days when the first leaves fall gently, and the seasons have come to their full time.

His uncle and aunt talked of his "schoolin'" as the winter approached. They had their plan. Ira Pember-ton's boy had been at the "Commercial Institute" in Rockland, and had graduated after two years into a clerkship in Bath. Ira's boy had not impressed Jack pleasantly. He was a sharp village boy, who imitated in his clothes the youth at the cottages. But as Jack had nothing else to suggest, he entered the Rockland business college. Early in the spring he returned to the Neck to help on the farm, and the second summer slipped away as the first. When Christmas had passed and Aunt Julia was making preparations for his going to Rockland, Jack spoke his mind:—

"I can't go back there, Aunt Julia," he said squarely.

"Why?" the comfortable woman asked with soothing slowness. "Don't they treat you right, Jock? They say it's a good school."

"I learned all they have to teach about bookkeeping in a few weeks — and there isn't anything else."

His aunt waited patiently. She could not understand his repugnance to the cheap country boys with their talk of fifteen dollars a week, their dream of getting to Boston or Portland as the farthest goal in life. They were ambitious "clodhoppers," but worse than the simple animal.

"What are yer goin' to do if you don't try bizness?" she asked at last. "You don't want to hang around here like them fence-rails up to the store."

"I don't know yet," the young fellow answered. "I guess I'll find out some day."

"Don't go dreaming, Jock," his aunt commented pleasantly.

"I've been speaking to Hadley about yer," Uncle John put in rather morosely. "He might take yer for second clerk at the hotel, if yer'd finished your schoolin' up at Rockland."

"I can do his job," Jack answered confidently, and then added more slowly, "and I will. I'll go over to see him soon. I won't disappoint you."

"I'm afraid he's going to be like his father," Aunt Julia remarked later to her husband.

"He won't get no help here for any foolishness," John Pemberton answered grimly. "Hadley'll show him what to do to get a dollar. He's smart enough."

So when Hadley Pemberton's big hotel on the Neck opened the next June, Jack Pemberton registered the early guests, and, as the country girls had not yet come

from the normal schools, waited upon them at table. There were only a few old people the first week, who did not embarrass the awkward boy. Yet, as he stood behind their chairs and took their orders, his white apron dangling about his legs, he was conscious of what his mother would feel should she suddenly appear. When the rest of the "help" arrived, however, he would not be obliged to wait at table.

The second Monday of his service more guests came, and at dinner a party of people from one of the cottages had a small table to themselves. As he stood by them to get orders, one of them, a middle-aged gentleman, his head bent over the menu, growled:—

"Waiter! Take that dish away! And don't touch my chair. Here, this napkin is damp."

He uttered these complaints without looking from the menu, and continued to his table companions, "That's the trouble with these Maine hotels,—beastly service—country louts."

Jack, whose hand had fallen carelessly on the back of the stranger's chair, started as if he had touched hot steel. His face crimsoned, and his arm twitched. Something inherent in every self-respecting American made him loathe his position even more than he detested the man who had insulted him. He had convinced himself that his mother's feelings about such matters were silly, and yet when it came to the pinch, a dumb instinct of self-respect made him revolt. He took the offending dish with a sweep of his hand, as if he were about to throw it at the stranger's bent head. His eyes met the intelligent

glance of a young woman who sat opposite the man. He had not seen her before, and his hand was arrested in its violent motion. She was smiling sympathetically, as if she had caught the whole thing and understood his feelings better than he did. When his eyes met hers, the smile deepened.

It was a wonderfully speaking face! Every feature seemed to do its best to make constant expression. The warm gray eyes, the curving mouth, the soft little hands that strayed over the table-cloth, smoothing it out,—all spoke meaningly. As Jack paused, the objectionable dish suspended in the air, the man looked up impatiently and would have burst out again.

“Won’t you get me a glass of water, please?” the girl interposed quickly, holding up the thick tumbler and smiling at the young fellow. When Jack took the tumbler from her fingers, she detained him by an imperceptible motion of her hand, and asked in a low, resonant, half-laughing voice:—

“What is your name? You weren’t here last year.”

“Pemberton,” Jack muttered thickly; “Jack Pemberton.”

“Thank you, Mr. Pemberton,” the girl said quickly, throwing the merest stress on the conventional title of respect. “Mr. Cushing would like a dry napkin, if you can get it for him; and bring us all some clear soup and fish, if it’s nice.”

She paused and looked up seriously into the young fellow’s face, as if she were relying upon his judgment and good will in an important matter.

"If it's fresh, you know, right out of the Bay. What do you think?"

"My uncle caught it this morning," Jack replied simply, blushing again. "And I brought it over here."

"Ah, that's the kind! A personally conducted fish right from the water."

He went out to the serving-room with his tray, feeling that he had been despatched on a confidential mission. Years after, when his experience had shown him the tactful manners of many facile people, this woman's simple method of direct approach remained as potent as on that day.

"You'll spoil him, Elsie," her mother objected placidly, when the boy had gone.

"Don't think it," the girl laughed. "You can't handle these people like club waiters, Mr. Cushing. That boy may be your governor, or something. He has a keen face,—handsome, don't you think so? Oh, you didn't notice—you were fussing over your napkin! I am as hungry as the Frenchman at Pau. That beastly steamboat gives you such an appetite. Did you see the wretches strewn about the floor this morning—"

She galloped on, with a never-failing zest for talk, taking the commonest incidents as hurdles for her dashing humor.

Outside in the serving-room Jack Pemberton was biting his lip in mortification and self-consciousness, hating himself, his uncle, Hadley Pemberton. When he appeared finally with his great tray piled high above his flapping apron, he heard the girl's laughing tones:—

“Here comes my Ganymede! How like Jove’s eagle he bears aloft—”

They had been making sport of him! Suddenly he placed the dishes on the nearest table and went out to the serving-room to order one of the newly arrived girls to wait on them.

After dinner the clerk, who had come from Boston on the afternoon boat, gave his assistant a lesson in his duties as head waiter.

“You don’t want to shoo the people to their seats like a country sexton at a funeral. Just walk up the dining room as if you were leading the band, and pull out the chairs *so*, with a flourish, so the folks will feel grand as they sit down. And show some sense between folks. I saw you hustling that old man Wilkinson to his seat and lettin’ A. R. Wyman find his place himself. Wilkinson and his family take two small rooms in the annex, and Wyman has the best suite every year. Keep your wits about you and know your people. Mr. Cushing’s been kicking to me about you already.”

The clerk, a trim, carefully dressed young man, who was third assistant clerk in a Boston hotel, continued his instructions in a not unkindly manner, as if he were conscientiously rehearsing the rudiments of a good education. As they sat down to their supper with the house-keepers, he concluded his remarks:—

“You want to jolly ’em up—ask how the fishin’ has gone. Inquire now and then whether everything is all right, and tell ’em you’ll speak to Mr. Pemberton when they kick. And when things give out in the kitchen,

make up a good story, — stuff 'em with taffy all you can, anyways. The feller that had your place last year was a college boy, and he carried away two hundred dollars, besides his salary and keep for the ten weeks."

Jack took his supper at the hotel, for he relieved the clerk at the desk during the evening hours. The housekeepers gave him little attention, confining their interest to the head clerk. They talked about the new arrivals and the cottage owners.

"Did you see Mr. Cushing's yacht, *The Skylark*, come in to-day?" the first housekeeper asked. "It's anchored up the cove, off Parker's Point."

"He's awful sweet on that Mason girl this time," the second housekeeper added. "It's the third season his yacht's been in here — most all summer last year."

"He's a high roller," the clerk commented. "His wine bills are more'n all the rest of the hotel put together."

"Well, the girls don't see his money — he's as mean as dirt."

"I guess Lettie did," the clerk added significantly. The women giggled, and looked suspiciously at young Pemberton.

"Where is she now?"

The clerk shrugged his shoulders as if to say how should he know where were the snows of yesteryear.

"I saw her once drivin' in Fifth Avenue."

"With *him*? Oh, he's a *hard* one."

"Say, that cook you got from New York is just fine." And the talk went on in mumbled mouthfuls.

All that evening Jack furtively watched for another view of the girl whose rapid eyes had read him so easily; but in vain. He handed out keys, discussed the arrival and the departure of mails, sold postage stamps, listened to complaints about chambermaids, and answered the thousand little aimless questions of the pampered "guests," but never once did the girl or her mother or Mr. Cushing come through the broad open doors from the veranda. When the clerk, who had been out driving, came in, Jack ventured to ask him what rooms the Masons had.

"Oh, they ain't in the hotel this year," the clerk answered nonchalantly. "They've rented the big Peters cottage up around Parker's Point."

As Jack went home he made a detour by way of the shore road. When he reached the summit of a little hill that shelved off gradually into the water, he noticed the dark lines of a schooner yacht, its night lights burning dimly in the damp air. The Peters cottage on the crest of the hill was well lighted, and as he lingered he heard the tinkle of a piano, now soft, now loud, as though played by an idle hand in the interludes of desultory talk.

He walked on between the bayberry-scented thickets in the still night, realizing dimly some of the social facts of life which had seemed so grotesque in Pancoast Lane. This gayly lighted cottage was a territory as much beyond his reach as the Shah of Persia's palace. He did not know that he wanted to reach it especially. But he resented the fact that he was kept within the territory of

the clerk and the housekeepers and the waitresses, that his was the back door entrance upon life. In a way the cottage realm was no more real than the servants' table realm, but for the first time he was conscious of a desire to pick, to choose his world, not to have it thrust upon him in the careless revolutions of fate.

Aunt Julia and Uncle John were sitting up for him, and when he came in, they asked slowly, hiding their curiosity behind a lethargic calm:—

"How are you gettin' on up at the hotel? Hadley said anything?"

"I guess it's all right," he answered wearily. "Some things well and some things badly. I can keep the books all right and give satisfaction, when I've learned how to smooth people out. I'm going to bed," he concluded abruptly.

"He don't seem just contented," Aunt Julia remarked after he had gone.

"I guess he'll make out," Uncle John replied, as he gathered up his discarded boots. "Ther's a place there for a clerk, so Hadley told me, if he takes hold. Hadley pays that feller from Boston a hundred dollars a month and keep. He'd give Jack seventy-five next year!"

Later he ventured to express a doubt:—

"I hope he won't go messin' round with them table-girls. Arthur was a great hand for girls, more's the pity."

"I never heard Jock mention a thing about a girl," Aunt Julia replied placidly. "Seems as if he never looked at 'em."

"Oh! he can *look* all right," the old fisherman retorted slyly.

Above, underneath the peak of the roof, Jack was trying to get to sleep, his brain heated with confused ideas. He kept hearing the clatter of heavy crockery as it slid back and forth in the hands of the dishwashers, the fanning to and fro of large doors, the shrill exclamations of the waitresses, the tinkle and clash of plates and knives and forks in the big, bare dining room. He jumped from his hot bed, and put his head out of the tiny window. The night air was heavy with salty fog, and the hills across the bay were dark as if a thick curtain had been let down at the end of an act. The face of the girl who had looked into his eyes came out of the mist and stayed with him.

CHAPTER VI

“WHAT are you doing there?”

Jack straightened up and blushed, as he recognized the Masons' smart little run-about and the young woman who held the reins. She had pulled up her horse abruptly, and held him firmly as he tried to get away down the bush-fringed road.

“I'm cutting balsam for the hotel. They're going to have some show or other this evening.”

“How nice it smells! Here, Tom, take the trap home.”

She cleared the awkward wheel skilfully, and shook herself as she lightly touched the road before Jack could offer her any help.

“Drive on, Tom,” she said quickly, turning toward the young clerk. “I'll help you. I drove over to Ledge Harbor — stupid place — to luncheon, and I didn't know what to do before dinner. This *is* nice!”

She threw herself luxuriously on the bundle of boughs and tore off her hat, stretching out her well-shod feet with the air of a nicely licked kitten. The white waist and stiff piqué skirt were more becoming than the clothes she had worn on the few occasions when Jack had caught glimpses of her. As she lay stretched out on the green boughs, her brown hair crushed against her white neck, she was a figure of perfect animal freshness and vitality. Jack devoured the picture in awkward silence.

"Don't stand there staring at *me*. Get about your work and let me see how you select the balsam."

He began to cut branches feebly, but in a few minutes sat down at the edge of the pile.

"It's too fine to work. Besides, I've got most enough."

"Tell me," the girl demanded abruptly. "How do you come here? You aren't old Hadley Pemberton's son—you aren't one bit like any of them. I could see that when you almost flung that dish at Mr. Cushing."

She laughed merrily, and suddenly stopped, turning her eyes appealingly on the boy as if he were the one essential person she had ever met in the world.

"My father came from here," Jack replied rather stiffly.

"What did he do? What *was* he?" the girl asked brusquely, as if between them there would be no reserves. "You know I like to find out all about people and what they do, and I *knew* you were new at the business."

"He was a music teacher," Jack said shortly.

"And you are fond of music?" she pressed on eagerly.

"I don't know anything about it. My mother wouldn't let me learn—she was afraid I'd grow up to be a music teacher."

"And she didn't think much of the profession," the girl suggested coaxingly.

"I guess she thought—she thinks—it beneath the family, like being a drug clerk, or waiter in a hotel," the boy ended sardonically.

"So you're going to be something different," she said neutrally, as if she were merely drawing inferences for her own amusement.

"Yes," Jack replied shortly.

"What will it be?"

"I don't know — not clerking in a hotel, I guess."

"I see," the girl mused. "You don't like waiting on people —"

"Not for their food and drinks and rooms."

"And you don't like the people you see."

"I don't know. I never saw many others. The girls that work there are nice enough."

Miss Mason settled back on her balsam boughs and shaded her eyes from the warm sun, patting her plump arms approvingly. The boy continued: —

"I don't like being different."

"From what?" Miss Mason turned her gray eyes upon him wonderingly.

"From other people."

"But you're not. You're six feet tall, and built like a varsity crew man, with two arms, two eyes, two ears —"

"You know what I mean," Jack interrupted impatiently. But if she did know, she did not choose to let him see it. Suddenly she pointed to the shore beneath them and said, with a fresh burst of interest: —

"What's that man doing down there?"

"He's dipping salmon from a weir," Jack answered indifferently.

"How does he do it? I mean, how do they get in? Tell me all about it."

Her breathless eagerness made the boy laugh.

"Why, they swim in — I'll take you over and show you them at low water. It's my uncle's weir."

"And is that your uncle down there?"

Jack squinted at the dumpy little figure wading about in rubber boots, and said slowly:—

"Yes."

"You live with him?"

"Yes."

"If you don't get to work, Mr. Pemberton, they won't have their decorative foliage for the ball this evening."

"I don't care to work for your amusement."

The girl sat up, a new wonder on her face.

"That isn't the way to speak to a woman."

"I don't know how to speak to a woman—at least, if she's any different from a man."

"She's very different from a man. That's your first lesson in life. Tell her every time you can that you are treating her just like a man—and *don't*."

She jumped up from her couch and took the hatchet from Jack. After cutting boughs until she was breathless, she said:—

"Now let's go home."

"I'll take you through the woods—I know a way over the hill to your cottage."

Miss Mason looked at him shrewdly, and then turned up the hill in the direction he pointed. She walked lightly, swinging her lithe body from stone to stone in the rough road. She was alive with energy, like an active child that perpetually must have fresh food for its hands and eyes and mind. Every now and then she stopped abruptly and peered at some object,—a bug, a flower, a bit of water in the deep hoof-mark left by a

cow,—and each time she chatted about it like a wren building a nest.

The boy watched her eagerly, absorbed in her fine, rapid motions, in her breathing, abundant life. He had never seen any one so wonderfully alive. She was frothing like a heady wine, and brilliant like a tree in the sun. It made no difference what she said or did; it was all alike unexpected and apparently important. He was immensely curious in a shy way to know more about her,—what she did, what she said about things, what people she saw.

“Hello!” Miss Mason exclaimed, as the road came out into an open field. “There’s a new yacht in! I bet it’s Tommy Enderson’s. We’ll have some sport if it is. This place is as dull as a German spa; don’t you think so?”

Jack wondered what a German spa might be, but he busied himself in helping his companion over a stile where the barbed wire caught her skirt. He carefully unhooked the skirt from the fence while she watched him seriously, her face very close to his. He turned his eyes once from the skirt and noticed how much like a child’s the girl’s face looked at close range,—the soft skin, the serious gray eyes, the trembling curve of the mouth. She breathed in little gasps like an excited child.

“Don’t make eyes at me, clumsy!” she commanded. “You’ll tear it, and I haven’t another decent frock to cover me with.”

And then, when he had finally extricated her, she gave him her hand graciously and stepped daintily over

the stile. There was only one field more between them and the cottage; Jack was suddenly anxious to ask some questions. Finally he stammered:—

“What makes people different; men, I mean?”

“They’re born different, I expect.”

“That isn’t *all*. I mean what makes Mr. Robinson, the clerk, different—well, from that Mr. Cushing,” he blurted out, at a loss for a better example.

“Why, why everything,” she answered, looking at him with curious eyes.

“It isn’t money, is it, altogether?” He pressed for a definite answer.

“They’ve lived differently,” she answered more seriously, — “known different kinds of people, had different opportunities in society.”

“How have the men you know lived?”

“Some of them have had money. The best of them came from good families, where they always saw nice people, and had advantages.”

Unconsciously they walked more closely together. Jack had noticed that whenever she was especially interested she drew very close to his side, an instinctive expression of comradeship, her arm brushing his, her elbow touching his in the uneven passages of the road. Now she loitered and looked confidingly into Jack’s face, her gray eyes round with sympathy, in constant wonder over the dramatic surprises of life.

“Then if a man isn’t born so as to have the right sort of people around him, he will always be ‘different’?” Jack asked simply and incisively.

"Why, there's education!" the girl exclaimed. "I forgot that. That counts so much nowadays!"

"What do you mean by education?"

"Why, why — I can't tell," the girl stammered, more puzzled. "Knowing things, silly! No, not that: looking at things in a way that isn't common, being clever — oh, heavens, boy! ask me something easier."

"I am not a boy," Jack retorted stiffly, drawing away from her as if to indicate that, if her interest was a condescension to his youth and inexperience, he would have none of it.

"Yes, you are," she laughed back, "or you wouldn't be asking me such fool questions!"

He laughed in the contagion of her good spirits.

"The men I've known," she continued, considering the question seriously, "the most interesting, were college men. I don't mean college *made* them interesting, but they came from the great universities."

"Oh!" the boy rejoined, illuminated. "Harvard and Yale?"

"Yes, but I've seen regular muffs — duffers, you know, — who were Harvard or Yale men. It isn't enough to go there; you've got to be the sort that gets something out of it, — polish, poise, ideas — all that. Wow! what a stretch you put my brain to!"

"I see!" the boy exclaimed. He walked on musingly, his mind probing the fresh considerations his companion had suggested; he was so absorbed in them that he did not notice when they reached the little gravel path of the cottage.

"Won't you come in?" Miss Mason asked heartily. "Come in, and we'll have something good to drink."

Jack hesitated a moment, instinctively drawing back from any contact with this other, more privileged existence, and then glancing into the spontaneous, winning face of the girl, he yielded to her and threw down the fir branches.

In the large living-room of the cottage a little group of chattering men and women were seated about a wicker tea-table in various lounging attitudes. As Miss Mason opened the door, letting in the strong sea-breeze, with a touch of the ardent summer sun, the talkers paused and looked at her, each one expecting to be relieved of his individual ennui.

"Anything good to drink?" she demanded generally. "I *know* Bushy has had something better than tea. Oh, mother, let me present to you — Mr. Pemberton."

She brought the name out slowly and looked about at the various faces, with a little smile of amusement. A middle-aged, rather fleshy woman extended a hand to the stranger. "Glad to see you — where *have* you been, Elsie?"

"And Miss Chesney," the girl continued, her quiet amusement deepening.

A tall, handsome young woman with strong features nodded imperceptibly and looked at the awkward boy.

"And Mr. Cushing," Miss Mason ended.

The man, whom Jack had judged to be over fifty, but was really hardly forty, mumbled some acknowledg-

ment, and turned abruptly to Miss Chesney: "The beast bolted, and I told Harry —" he continued.

Miss Mason was shaking hands with a pale girl who sat at one side. She looked at Jack as if expecting an introduction, but Miss Mason apparently forgot her charge. Miss Mason seemed to treat this visitor less easily than the others, and the two girls were soon in the thick of talk. Jack, left to himself, was infinitely angry that he had been beguiled into his position. He glanced about the rooms; there was a profusion of photographs, books, music-scores, some odd-looking candlesticks, and strange, dull pieces of old silver. To him the cottage seemed luxurious and complete, as if these people had been living in it for years, instead of weeks. The ornaments, in themselves of slight value, gave an impression of personal refinement, of individuality. In one corner over a writing table was draped a piece of stained brocade, giving what Miss Mason's friends called her "touch," her sense of "effect."

He was wondering how he might escape from these people who talked on without heeding him. Suddenly Miss Mason came toward him with a cup of tea; he blushed afresh and refused it, consciously.

"Bushy," the girl remarked, still standing by the boy, "do you know, I believe Tommy Enderson's yacht is in. Mother, Tommy'll be here for dinner. Get out all your wine and your beer, for Tommy is uncommon dry when he reaches Maine."

The pale girl's face looked polite contempt. Miss Chesney remarked: —

"Tina said he would be in some day this week."

"Tina isn't going to have him," Miss Mason retorted. "We'll carry him off under Tina's sharp little nose."

"Elsie!" Mrs. Mason protested feebly.

A new-comer—a fresh-colored, tall young man—slipped into the group with a familiar nod and word to all. Jack managed to rise and indicate the fact that he wanted to depart. He did not like Miss Mason here, as he had liked her on the boughs, in the wood road. There was something cheaply flippant and common in her familiarity with the world, which he did not understand.

"You'll come again!" the girl said cordially, looking into his face with her pleading, personal air. "And we'll go down to the shore, won't we? Bushy, Mr. Pemberton is going to take me whale-fishing down by the cove in those queer places."

Mr. Cushing made no sign of having heard anything, and in a moment Miss Mason was talking to the new young man. Jack knew that he should have gone before. By the time his back was turned, the group was at its chaff once more, without a thought of him. The boy's color rose, and he ground his teeth, foolishly. He would take care not to let himself be caught in that way again.

Once outside the cottage, however, on the deserted road, in the cool sharp shadows of the Maine twilight, he forgot his personal annoyance, and as he hurried to the hotel with the balsam, his heart was suffused with a gentle happiness, a personal warmth, that it had rarely

known. The girl had a warm, clinging charm that surmounted her brusqueness, her slang, her careless manners, that set her quite apart. He could see her smile, hear her breathless words, sounding in his ears like a bustling brook among the hills.

In a patch of raspberry bushes beside the road he noticed the calico sun-bonnet of a little girl. The child had fallen asleep under the bunches of syrupy, ripe, red berries, and as she lay, her little arm doubled under her stained face, he caught a close resemblance to the young woman he had left, — the same full, curving, little lips, the soft, moist cheek like the skin of dew-sprinkled fruit. The girl was but a bounteous child. He gathered up the stray morsel under the berry bushes and carried her tenderly, still asleep, to the cottage across the road. Thus shielding her from the damp dews, he seemed in a way cherishing the woman who had spoken to him out of the silent reaches of his unpeopled world. And the man's instinct for expression of love, for protection and service of something wayward, awoke with a fierce tenderness, a hunger that threatened his content.

A good many days followed in which he caught no glimpse of Elsie Mason. Miss Chesney he saw at the hotel once or twice, and received a cool, slight nod. When he met Mr. Cushing on the wharf, that person passed him over as one of the idle loafers that frequented the boat-landing. Every night on his return to his uncle's cottage he took the winding "cove road," with a boy's shy hope of some accident in the routine of life. But the Mason cottage remained like the other

cottages sprinkled over the Neck—a little world by themselves, whose occupants came and went, passing him heedlessly on the hard highroads of life.

But his mind was at work, pondering minutely certain ideas set in motion by this ignorant, careless girl. She had touched his imagination with vague fancies of a larger existence than he had ever dreamed of. At the hotel there was living a tutor, who coached certain hours each day the idle sons of the cottagers, who had failed in their examinations at Harvard and Yale. From him Jack learned what he must know to enter a large university. Then he wrote to his sister, asking her to send him the books Steve had used at the Academy. And the good-natured tutor, who had felt the sting of ambition in narrow circumstances, lent him other books and helped him with the cleverness of the expert in furnishing the least possible information required for a pass-mark. Thus, blindly, the boy stretched out his hands to another future.

Later when his uncle asked him if the Boston clerk couldn't get him a place in a city hotel for the winter, he answered steadily:—

"I don't want one. I am going to college as soon as I can get in."

In the agony of his tongue-tied habit of mind, the old fisherman could only scratch his head.

"You doan't want to fuss with books," his aunt answered, flattening her vowels in the excitement of her fear. "That's loike your fayther. You're going the same way, and he didn't get much satisfaction—"

"Where?" Uncle John jerked out at last.

"Harvard. That's the biggest and best."

His tone was so calm and confident that it disarmed much of the protest. He spoke as if it were a small matter of choice, upon which he had exercised his judgment and could not be stirred.

"Land save us!" his uncle spluttered. "You speak as if you were a millionaire's son; one of them fellers that go about summers in cotton drawers. Where do you think the money'll come from?"

"I don't know. I shall have a little in the fall, and the fellow that's tutoring at the hotel says you can get on somehow, if you are smart enough."

"It's your father over again," Uncle John replied, more calmly, sadly. "*He* didn't get on fur. I thought you'd seen the dog-arsed foolishness of it, and was goin' to make money."

"Perhaps I shall," the boy protested. "There were other Pembertons beside my father who went to college, and they did something — there's Judge Cyrus, and Elwell Pemberton —"

The fisherman waved his hand resignedly. He accepted the decision without comment, in the dumb, fateful manner of the silent puritan. He never referred to the question again. But to his wife, later, he said, "Same as Arthur, same as Arthur!"

"Except for the women. He doesn't trouble with the girls much."

"He will fast enough, when that comes on him," the old man replied dejectedly.

"He's full of dreams, Jock is,—goes 'round as if folks and things were no more than a basket of clothes-pins."

"I guess he'll learn 'taint so 'fore he gets through with the world."

"He's chock full o' dreams," the old woman repeated, self-satisfied with her analysis, and without complaint. The world held such people once in so often, and it was useless to worry yourself over them. They would right themselves sooner or later, after one or two knocks against the surfaces of circumstance, or sink submerged in their own folly.

CHAPTER VII

THE "help" in the hotel were to have their annual picnic the last week of August. They were to take buckboards to a little shanty on a lake among the hills, and have supper and a dance, returning by moonlight, like the "city-folks." The affair was managed by the chief clerk, who left most of the details to Jack. At first Jack was determined not to go, for the manners of some of the "table-girls" made him uncomfortably shame-faced, and he remembered with disgust how the buckboards passed his uncle's house the year before, the men shouting inanely, the women laughing immoderately. He thought they were all drunk. But as the day for the picnic drew nearer, he feared that his refusal to join them would be taken very ill by his fellow-laborers, and he was ashamed of his desire to keep apart from them.

So, after the dinner at the hotel, which had been put forward to give the servants a long evening, he got into the last buckboard with two girls, rather quieter than the others, with whom he felt more or less at home. The drive out to Clear Lake in the cool twilight was demure enough. The two girls on his seat left him alone, — he fancied they were rather provoked at having him for an escort, — and talked to themselves about the people at the hotel and the cottagers.

"The Mathers have four girls and two men," Hope Haskins observed.

"The Masons have only three," Ruth Maxwell replied tolerantly; "but they're real nice people, not a bit fussy. And do you see how the Mason girl dresses—she had on a long, cream-colored coat the other day when it was cold—broadcloth. My! it makes your eyes pop out. And she has a different waist for every hour in the day—"

"She ain't anythin' to compare with that Chesney girl," Hope broke in, disdainfully. "The Masons ain't much—tryin' to know folks, I guess; but General Mather is the real thing, a first-class swell, and barrels and barrels of money. And Mis' Mather has her own maid, a foreign woman, I should think, by the looks of her. She wears clothes fit for a queen herself."

"Well," Ruth drawled, picking at the sleeves of her stiff shirtwaist, "I want nothin' better than the Masons. I waited on table for 'em when they first come, before they begun housekeepin', and I know real nice people when I see 'em. Mis' Mason gave me this skirt."

Jack found himself listening with interest to the gossip about the two families. Suddenly Hope appealed to him with a little conscious laugh:—

"Say, Mr. Pemberton, ain't that young college feller down here a-studyin' with the General's son?"

"He's tutoring him for Harvard," Jack replied.

"I see you're quite thick with him. Thinking of being a college boy yourself?"

"Perhaps," he admitted uncomfortably.

"Won't you be fine, with one of them great shirts on, covered with figures like a cashmere shawl!"

The girls giggled and looked at the boy quizzically.

"You'll be too grand to wait on table and run 'round with ice-pitchers, I pre-sume," Hope drawled teasingly.

"Most too fine now," her companion giggled. "He'll be puttin' on a swaller-tail coat and takin' his dinner up to the cottages."

"Look how Mr. Cramp is carryin' on with Sadie. He ought to be ashamed of himself, teasin' her like that. Say, Mr. Cramp, who was the girl you went out sailin' with last Sunday?"

The young man on the front seat, who combined the duties of barber with those of barkeeper, turned and winked.

"I know another girl who'd 'a' *liked* to been there."

"Oh, you *do*!" his companion, Sadie Pemberton, a fat, red-cheeked girl, scoffed. "You can keep your old boat to yourself, Mr. Cramp. I've my own feller. I don't have to pick up with any city dude that clips hair."

"You don't, don't you?" the young barber jeered. "Well, come in some day and let me clip that bang for you. Ladies in fashion aren't wearing bangs this year. They does their hair up in a mop, *so*."

He illustrated the fashion by grasping the thick braids of his companion. She squealed, and the barber put his arms around her to hold her. She shrieked louder and fought energetically, until the rest of the buckboard was aroused and took part in the game. Hope and Ruth

tried to pinch the barber's arm in intervals of giggles. Finally Cramp released his grip.

"You're sorry now!" he exclaimed, looking at Jack and winking broadly, as if to say, "That's the way to handle the girls."

Ruth Maxwell turned to Jack.

"They *do* carry on dreadful. That Cramp feller is awful rude with the girls."

Ruth was known among the girls of the hotel as "pious." She attended prayer-meeting in the Mills meeting-house every Wednesday evening. She was slight and thin, with a flickering complexion of a red sweet-pea blossom. Jack had noticed that she was too frail to carry her heavy trays, and had often relieved her when he could. She nestled closer to him away from the boisterous party, who were teasing Sadie Pemberton. For the rest of the drive Jack talked with Ruth, and she confided in him her ambition "to go up state to the Normal School" and teach. She did not like "hotel work," but "pop" had six children, all girls but one. And Jack gathered that "pop" was rather shiftless.

When the buckboard drew up by the shanty known as Clear Lake Hotel, the two were good friends. Jack helped the other men to unload the case of beer and the packages of cake and pie, and to build the fire. There was no necessity for the fire, but Cramp insisted on one being built. What was a picnic without a fire? The blaze was started amid much chaffing and joking. Cramp received a box on the ear from a frisky kitchen girl and returned it with good will. The girl cried,

and the Boston clerk rebuked Cramp for being so "tuff and loud." There followed an explosive altercation between the barber and the clerk, who made a favorable impression by saying that, "All these young ladies don't want such impoliteness." Finally the dispute was drawn by a joke, and the party scattered into the woods and along the fine sandy beach of the lake, two by two. The clerk led off the assistant house-keeper to "Moonlight Dell." Cramp poled Sadie Pemberton in a leaky, flat-bottomed scow after lily-buds. Jack found himself with the gentle little table-girl; the two strolled beside the still lake that lay as light as day under the full moon. The pastry-cook, a tall auburn-headed man, disappeared with his companion into the thicket ahead of them. In the uncertain broken moonlight Jack caught sight of the man's arm about the girl's waist, and a moment later his keen ears detected the sounds of a faint, affected protest from the girl. He imagined that the arm had been drawn more tightly about the woman's waist. Ruth had seen the man and the girl, too, and had heard the noise in the thicket. She laughed a little self-consciously, remarking:—

"Some men are so awful rude and heady!"

Jack, realizing that the manner rather than the act offended his companion, made no reply. He felt ill at ease, here in the soft moonlight and shadow, with so much merry, frank courting going on around him, and this girl brushing close by his side.

"That's what they most always do at these suppers,"

Ruth continued as Jack remained silent. "They get off in the woods by themselves —"

Her sentence was interrupted by a shriek followed by a loud giggle from a point across the lake. Jack stepped on impatiently, irritated with himself for "feeling goody," as his companion would have said.

"Some folks don't mind letting the whole world know what they're up to," Ruth observed rather censoriously.

"Let's walk out to the point over there," Jack suggested hastily, and hurried on his companion.

When they reached the spit of sand that he had indicated, Ruth sat down, saying she was "mortal tired and couldn't drag a step." Jack threw himself on the sand by her side and said nothing.

"Don't you like girls?" Ruth asked at last.

"I don't know many," Jack admitted.

"Hain't you any sisters or cousins?"

"One sister. Plenty of cousins hereabouts. I suppose that Sadie Pemberton is one of my cousins — same name and same district."

Ruth settled herself more comfortably very near her companion.

"I kind 'er thought you didn't fancy girls."

"Why?"

"Oh! all the girls at the hotel say so. Some think you're stuck up, but I said it weren't so."

"I haven't anything to be stuck up about," Jack observed.

"You're awful good to me!"

Jack flung a stone into the water. It dimpled the silver surface for a moment. Then Ruth began a new subject.

"I had a feller keepin' company with me last winter. He worked in a store up at Stacey's Falls, and used to come over Sundays, but pop didn't like him. Pop was real mean."

"Did you like him?" Jack asked, to make conversation.

"Pretty well. He weren't rough like that Cramp feller. He gave me that ring."

She held out her hand: the little palm was white and bloodless; a small gold ring circled one of the red fingers. The little hand—wasted and red from the constant washing of heavy dishes—appealed to Jack. It might have been such a pretty hand, soft and delicately tapered like Miss Mason's.

"There's some kind of a foreign stone in it—can you see?"

Jack took the proffered hand in his, and examined the ring more closely. Ruth bent her head nearer, and they looked at the ring without speaking. At first Jack found it awkward to drop the hand, and then as he kept it, he had a strange, new pleasure. The gentle little girl by his side, with her sweet-pea color, and delicate, wistful features, pleased him. She did not seem to mind his holding her hand. A restful, dreamy look stole over her tired face, and he knew that she was very grateful to him for being with her, for not being "rough" like the others. He put his arm behind her to shelter her, and insensibly she nestled closer and closer.

An unknown desire stirred his heart to thumping. A temptation swept over him to taste a sweet that seemed almost at his lips. Then, unaccountably, he hated himself for the thought, as for a piece of infidelity to something he knew not what. He dropped the girl's hand and drew himself away a very little. The impulse of the moment—the desire to taste and feel even for an instant a mortal, human thing—passed. Ruth looked at him with startled, reproachful eyes.

"Jack," she murmured, and obedient to her need of him, he took her hand again. With a sigh she let her head fall on his arm, close to his burning face.

"Save me! save me! I'm drowning!"

The cries came from the lake behind the point. Jack started up and ran to the shore. In the deceitful light he could see a boat floating, — a dark spot on the silver water, — and a man struggling to crawl upon its upturned bottom. The shrieks were from another figure floundering in the water a dozen feet from the boat. The man, who was Cramp, got on top of the boat and joined his cries to the woman's.

"She's drowning! Save her!"

"Why don't you help her, you fool!" Jack cried out, as he threw off his coat and waded into the water. By the time Jack reached them, the fat girl was breathless with terror and speechless from the water that she had gulped down. He got her ashore without much trouble; and in a few minutes she had revived enough to limp to the fire, holding his arm. The company, startled by Sadie's cries, came in from the nooks where they had

been carrying on their flirtations. The barber appeared last, trying to wring the water from his coat as he walked.

"Oh, you good-for-nothin' dog!" Sadie gasped at him, shaking her fist.

"Come, now, Sade, I was afeard of your tongue," the barber protested, trying to regain his swagger.

"Before I trust myself to a drinkin' man again —"

"He's cold water, now," the pastry-cook observed.

"I guess I'll mix a drink," the barber retorted, fetching a flask from the baskets.

"None of that!" the clerk said warningly. And Cramp was too depressed by his ruined clothes to insist upon having his drink.

The incident furnished talk and wit for the supper, which was eaten indoors about a roaring fire for the sake of the three wet people. When the "lager" was opened, the hilarity of the party rose by leaps and bounds. Sadie persisted in heaping attentions upon Jack, who, she averred, had saved her from drowning in that filthy pond. Jack protested that the water was not four feet deep where she was upset. But nothing could protect him from the girl's devotion. As Cramp's jealousy rose, her efforts increased. Then some one struck up a waltz on the wheezy piano in the corner, and Jack, protesting that he could not dance, found himself whirling around the room in the firm embrace of the plump Sadie. The others joined in the romp, bumping and jostling each other with the greatest good humor. Cramp had seized Ruth, and as they passed in their frantic whirl,

Jack could feel the girl's reproachful glances. But his robust partner held him in an iron embrace.

Suddenly the door swung open, letting in the calm moonlight and the damp, cool air. Jack glanced over the shoulder of his panting partner and caught sight of Miss Mason's cool gray eyes measuring the scene. A little smile flickered over her mouth, — a disdainful, impertinent smile. With her were several young women, and among them the pale young girl Jack had seen at Miss Mason's cottage. A tall gentleman, whom he recognized as General Mather, and his son were talking with the clerk, and presently they went outside, shutting the door.

"Don't let us disturb you," Miss Mason said coolly to the embarrassed group. "We've met with an accident; nothing serious."

"We should like to enjoy your fire, if you will be kind enough to let us," her companion added, in a more friendly manner. "But do keep on with your dance, or we'll go outside and wait."

Jack's face burned with resentment at Miss Mason's manner. He turned his discomfited eyes to the young girl who had just spoken. She, too, seemed to be looking at him in response to a low word from Miss Mason. Jack divined that she was the General's daughter, the little girl of the summer house beyond Cliff's garden. Perhaps she remembered him, too! He turned his back brusquely on the new-comers, defiant, yet provoked with himself; he was where he belonged in the social scheme of things.

"Pray, go on," Miss Mason remarked, picking her way daintily among the beer bottles and luncheon baskets towards the fire. As she passed Jack she smiled patronizingly at him, adding fury to his embarrassment.

"Come," he said roughly to his stout partner; "let's dance!"

But the girls were giggling and talking among themselves. Finally Cramp stepped forward as spokesman:—

"The ladies were saying, miss, that if you'd take a turn, we'd be very pleased—"

"I don't care to dance," Miss Mason replied shortly, after eying the man with cool scrutiny. She turned to the fire and tapped the bricks with the toe of her boot, as if the place did not exist for her. Her manners were so unlike what Jack expected from her, that he thought they must be due to the presence of the Mathers. Yet Miss Mather, turning to Ruth, said:—

"You haven't a partner. Will you dance? I can waltz man-fashion. Come! Miss Mason, please play for us."

Miss Mason thumped out "The Belle of New York" on the rusty piano in true music-hall style. But the party danced slowly and uncomfortably. The other strangers stood about the fire in conscious attitudes, talking among themselves. They were lithe, strong, young creatures, conspicuously well dressed, with mobile, pretty features. Not one was beautiful, but all were attractive. They gave the rough room another atmosphere, and the men and girls stared at them admiringly.

After a time the barber went up to Miss Mather and asked her to dance. She hesitated, while Miss Mason watched her from the piano; but then the door opened and the others returned. As the intruders went out, Miss Mason passed close to Jack. When he drew back stiffly and turned his face away, she paused and said teasingly:—

“You haven’t time to come to see me? Are you too busy with your friends?”

“I guess I don’t want to see you again,” the boy blurted out bitterly.

“Oh!” the girl laughed. “Good night.”

The little adventure ended the dance. The girls and men stood about discussing the strangers.

“Your Mis’ Mather don’t dress much different from us,” Ruth observed scornfully, to Hope.

“She don’t have to,” Hope answered discerningly.

“She ain’t a good color,—just a plain little girl,” added the barber, who resented his repulse. “Now I like a real good color.”

“Peony?”

“So you tried to see if it would wash!”

Sadie’s cheeks flamed amiably under the chaff. When the clerk said that it was time for them to start, Sadie consented to sit next to Cramp. As one buckboard had been surrendered to General Mather’s party, Jack and Ruth were crowded into the same seat with Cramp and his partner. Cramp’s arm was about Sadie’s waist, and his knuckles dug into Jack’s ribs. This contact irritated the boy, and Cramp’s witticisms about Miss Mather enraged him. The fact that this girl who had

given him his first snub should have found him there with the servants disturbed him more than Miss Mason's supercilious manners. He seemed to prove that she was right as a little girl in refusing his acquaintanceship. And he was angry with himself for caring about this, for being ashamed of his companions. What was Miss Mason to him, or the others? These were *his* people, — Ruth and Sadie and Cramp. Yet when Ruth made little advances, he scarcely answered her. His face burned as he thought of their talk by the lake, of how near he had been to playing the fool with this girl. He could not help contrasting these women with the girls in General Mather's party, and though he said to himself contemptuously "fine feathers," yet the memory of their pretty clothes, their delicate features, and white-gloved hands imposed itself upon him.

The noisy buckboards jolted over the stony roads to the accompaniment of little shrieks and bursts of empty laughter. Sadie squirmed in Cramp's embrace. The pastry-cook tickled Ruth with a bayberry branch from the seat behind, and Ruth complained in a querulous giggle, until Jack turned and seized the bayberry branch and flung it into the road.

"What's the matter with you, Snifty?" the red-headed man asked truculently.

By the time the buckboard drew up before his uncle's cottage, Jack felt that the party were glad to be rid of him. He had been a kill-joy.

"Go to bed, Sissy," the pastry-cook called out, as the horses started.

"Don't let your 'ma know you've been out with the girls," Cramp added.

"Please don't! I'm too young!" Sadie cackled in a falsetto note.

The buckboards disappeared down the hill in a rattle of small stones and a cloud of dust, with a trailing sound of loud laughter. Jack kicked a pebble into the road with vicious emphasis. The full moon shone placidly over the fields and rocky shore. The little cottage lay like a white tent in the soft gleam. The unearthly stillness of the place settled like a balm on the boy's troubled spirit.

What had made him thrill in response to that stupid little girl? How did those men amuse themselves fooling with loud-mouthed, silly women? Miss Mason, Ruth, Sadie, Hope,—all of them were sickly, unpleasant phantoms. He stretched his strong young frame with a shrug of contempt. His should be a world of *men*.

CHAPTER VIII

NEVERTHELESS he was not to escape so lightly from the world of women. His fellow-workers at the hotel amused themselves with guying him, the girls more insistently than the men, as if resenting his distaste for their sex. And the picture of the other young women, of Miss Mason especially, haunted him with unprovoked tenacity. He could not seem to free himself from the images created that night.

One day he took himself off into the woods, drawn by the silence and the calm of the purple hills across Green Hill Bay. His road ran up the windings of the Neck, across the farms of Parker's River, where his people had once thrived, around the marshy head-waters of the Bay, and then into the dense thickets of the slope. The day was still, as if summer were brooding over its departing glories, but above in the treetops of the higher slopes there sounded now and then the meditative rustle of the autumn wind. The clear air, like an old, rare wine, was warmed with the sun, which lay invitingly in the open glades of the forest. The exhausted streams trickled deep in their brown beds, talking in the ruminative manner of the hills. As he mounted higher along the first ridges of the range, he caught glimpses of the blue waters of the Bay and the long, spruce-wooded Neck.

The yachts of the summer people lay still as chips beyond the steamboat wharf. On a higher slope, which gave a view of the coast for many miles, edged to the west by a billowy sea of green woods, he stopped, content with his position. The sun drew out pungent, resinous scents from fir and spruce and arbor-vitæ. He threw himself down on a bed of dry moss, and thought as the sun sloped down into the woody plain behind.

There beneath him lay the fields where his people had lived and prospered and died out. Now he knew what it was to be a Pemberton! And he knew, also, what his mother and Steve aspired to be—like those inhabitants of the cottages on the Neck, like the people at the hotel for whose trivial wants he was hired to fetch and carry. And he desired neither. The distorted, coarsened figures of his cousins Pemberton told the story of a life of narrow, undeveloping toil. And something in his serious nature made him scorn, likewise, the ostentation, the cheap luxuries of “the city folks.” Instinctively he felt that the two were not far apart in the ultimate standard of things: Ruth and Sadie and Cramp, and those they served and envied. No! neither a square white cottage in the rocky fields, nor a “place” on the Neck: life must hold more than these two aspirations.

He wondered what his father had asked of life when he looked forth, from the same calm height, over the fields of the Pembertons. Some impulse must have stirred in that soul which he had known only in cloud, some great thirst to taste the unknown, to sail out of this Bay to the larger fields of men. And so he had set forth,

under the spell of this desire, to suffer shipwreck, alas! only a little way from port. He, too, might meet the same catastrophe, moved from the humble harbor of his race by the same blind desire. His jaws closed unconsciously, broadening the hard sweep of his chin. Well, then, let it be failure! For he should make trial of life, — how, he was yet at a loss to say. He had few landmarks to steer by, — the idle suggestion of an idle woman, the imagination of a boy over the privileges of others! To college, for a few years, and then where?

Some deep spirit, murmuring like the summer stream far down in the secret fastness of its rocky bed, promised that light would shine upon the way. The void of life, the peaceful calm that had filled the place of the abortive images of Pancoast Lane, would be peopled. Life would come, the real life, flooding into the empty bays like the swift tides of the north, — the real life that tantalized him now with rare glimpses of its beauty, — yes, the real world! He should know what was meant for eternity and what was the mist of the hour. . . .

His head sank back on the cool moss, and his eyes pierced the multitudinous leafy forest to the swimming blue above. The thick, syrupy scents of the oozing firs drowsed away his consciousness; the peace of the large woods, of the deep-hearted sea, carried him away.

And the unpeopled vista began to fill with shapes of men and things, shapes that he had never seen before, even in his swift glimpses of the other world. He moved among them as he would among solid objects, and he knew they were quite real, — not fictions between him

and his neighbors. Finally they marshalled off and left him climbing, climbing, swinging upwards through a cool forest of exquisite shade, with flashes of light like glints from steel swords, until he was alone, yet suddenly not all alone. For a woman was looking at him, — some one who knew an incredible amount that he did not, and yet who supplicated him with a smiling glance. She seemed to sketch stories of strange lives playfully, as if knowledge were nothing, and at the same time to plead with him for protection against — what? To plead for love and tenderness. Her face was more living than any human face he had ever seen; the muscles of her bare neck rippled under the repression of speech; and the skin of her cheeks and temples had the silkiness of vital flesh. She was so immensely tender! and yet so pleading with him for protection, beautifully supplicant! He found himself asking her, almost pettishly, “Where have you been all this time?”

And when she smiled, he added, more masterfully:—

“I don’t like living with shadows. Don’t go away again. I *knew* you were somewhere. Come, let us go home and be happy.”

He stretched out his hand to lead her over the rocks, and found the place very dark. He turned over to get at the light and her, and then he knew that she was not there.

As he betook himself down the dark hills, he was quite sure that she lived. This woman’s eager, speaking face was utterly unlike the countenance of any woman he had

ever seen. Yet was she much more real than anything vouchsafed him hitherto! He could turn his eyes on that vision at will, and feel the living, breathing actuality of it. It thrilled through his senses with a richness, an intimacy of emotion, that he had never imagined. He was fearful lest it should prove a picture of the hour, fading as he emerged into the dusk of the lower fields, like the purple garment of the hills. So, while he brushed on through the dew-scented grass, he kept turning his thoughts to her, suffusing himself with the subtle consciousness of her existence while it lasted, as the heated bather plunges his fiery face again and again into the water. Each moment he feared would be the last, but, to his joy, he discovered that it went on, this intimacy with the real, sharpening itself, rather than dulling, by use.

And for months and years thereafter in all the troublesome fret of the intangible world, this vision of the real stayed with him, keener at some periods, fainter at others, like a scarce-perceived scent about things laid away. But always fragrant with its own ineffable sweetness and tenderness, filling his soul with yearning, with belief, with courage.

CHAPTER IX

HE did not forget the girl who had given him the first great purpose of his youth. As he passed the Masons' cottage twice a day, he secretly desired the courage to go in. He knew that the Masons with the Mathers and a few other families were to linger on into the golden second summer. Most of the cottages were closing one by one; the hotel was to be shut at the end of the next week. Then he would have ten days to himself for his mathematics and Latin before the examinations began. The tutor, who remained for Ned Mather, had promised to give him more help. The tutor thought he had a fair chance of passing in enough subjects to admit him to Harvard.

One afternoon he met Miss Mason on the road near her cottage. He was hurrying diffidently past with a bare word, but she stopped him and stood to chat.

"Did you have a good time the other night at your party?" she asked familiarly.

"No!" he answered shortly, offended at the easy impudence she showed in referring to the occasion where she had snubbed him. He would have left her, if he had known how to do so.

"I saw that the thin little girl with the red cheeks was making eyes at you. Ruth — isn't that her name?"

Her mother does our washing. If you don't look out, Ruth will snare you. And the big one, too, the one you were dancing with. Who is she?"

"Why do you talk about them to me?" Jack exclaimed angrily. "You despise them and me. I guess they're all right, as good as the folks up at the hotel. Besides, I'm not going to bother with girls!"

"Oh!" she bowed mockingly. "Good afternoon, Mr. Pemberton."

The glossy leaves of a rank blackberry creeper threw flickering shadows over the girl's fair skin. In spite of her words, she did not move, but looked into his face with a teasing smile.

"I'm going to college this fall," he explained, "and maybe I shan't come back to the hotel."

"Mr. Ferris, the tutor, told me you meant to try the examinations. Do you think you can pass?"

"Somehow!" he answered lightly, with the assurance that might send him straight on his path. "I guess I won't be a star, but I'll get in somehow."

"What do your aunt and uncle think of it?"

"Just Pemberton foolishness," Jack replied, with a laugh. "Which way were you going?" he added, forgetting his resentment.

"Nowhere just yet; to the Mathers' later."

"The Mathers used to live near us at Riverside. I didn't expect to find them up here," Jack remarked irrelevantly.

"General Mather's house was the first summer cottage on the Neck. Did you know them?"

"No," Jack answered quickly, and then added, "Do you like them — the Mathers?"

"Not much," the girl responded impassively. "They're great swells in their way — and snobs."

The characterization was precisely what his own would have been, yet it displeased him to have her use those words. They jarred with the unconscious ideal of refinement he had created for her. And it surprised him to find that in this world of summer leisure where she lived there were grades, differences, circles within circles.

"I see something of Ned Mather at the hotel. He seems to be a good fellow."

"Oh! he's slated for the usual thing — all the best clubs at Harvard, and a chair in papa's office when he graduates."

"I thought General Mather wasn't in business," Jack observed with curiosity.

"Did you never hear of the banking firm of Lord, Mather, and Greenacre? The General doesn't do much. His eldest son goes to the office when he hasn't anything better to do. They just keep the firm going, it's so old and respectable. They made their money in cotton mills years and years ago, and so they have the right to look down on any money that's come since the war."

"Do you see much of 'em in New York?" Jack ventured to ask.

The girl laughed good-humoredly.

"You *don't* mind asking questions! I never met them before this summer. When we return, Mr. Roger will probably pay his respects to me once or twice, but his

mother and sister won't. Is there anything more I can tell you about my affairs?"

"I didn't mean to be impertinent," Jack answered penitently; "only you know such a lot more about people and things than I do."

"I don't mind telling you," the girl responded warmly. "Come, let's do something. Don't you want to cut your job for an hour or two? I am not dying for the Mathers' society this afternoon."

"I'll sail you over to Seal Island," Jack suggested impulsively, grateful for her kindness, which was but the whim of a capricious will. "The surf is great there now."

They turned up the road in the direction of the boat-landing, Jack tremulous with sudden pleasure, his tongue tied with multitudinous thoughts, unexpected things he wanted to say to this strange, beautiful, impulsive creature. They passed the tennis courts at the hotel, where the young people of the settlement were gathered. They hailed Miss Mason frequently, and she stopped to chat now and then, while Jack watched her furtively, fearful lest she might escape him. On the float were a large party who were preparing for a sail, and as soon as Miss Mason appeared, she was greeted with an approving chorus. The girl enjoyed the commotion she created, and she enjoyed still more the looks of amusement and surprise which came when she refused to join them. At last they pushed off, and Jack was relieved. Suddenly a new danger appeared in the person of young Mather, who came ashore from a yacht anchored in the cove. Jack,

whose heart had been jubilant, saw himself discredited. When Roger Mather approached Miss Mason with an air of special ownership, as if their meeting had been the most expected thing, Miss Mason's flippant manner changed; she was almost ill at ease. Mather spoke to her in low tones, and she seemed to hesitate. Then in a moment she responded unhesitatingly:—

"Sorry, but Mr. Pemberton and I are going over to Seal Island."

The young man looked over the girl's head at Jack with the impertinence of perfect self-possession.

"Ah!" he observed, and he loitered on the landing stage while Jack got the boat ready, hoisted the sail, and pushed off. Miss Mason's face had clouded over, and Jack, though grateful to her for her kindness, was sorry that he should be the means of her embarrassment. As the boat floated out from the calm water of the cove, he thought of the gay, prettily dressed girls, the handsome young fellows with slightly arrogant manners, to whom Miss Mason belonged. These sons and daughters of wealth, for whom he labored in a menial position, ordinarily meant nothing to him. They had their horse-show, their library fair, their dances, their picnics, their dinners, and made a great fuss over their amusements. For all that, he had had a mild contempt and no envy. They passed him on the hotel verandas, on the road, in the shops, at the landing stage, and he was merely not one of them: he was an unfelt ghost. But to-day, this afternoon, while he waited when she stopped to gossip with them, his feelings had changed. What made them

all so different! The girls whose fathers had often started their lives in more sordid lines than his had the elusive, faintly aristocratic air which wealth gives the American woman. The possession of riches—that was the necessary step toward being one of this gay little world. Then, as he reflected upon the strange influence the Mathers seemed to have over Miss Mason, he felt that something more than money was ultimately necessary. The boy was anxious to learn what this difference might be.

“Do you like Roger Mather especially?” he asked abruptly.

“No,” Miss Mason answered promptly. She had been pondering some matters also. She added frankly: “He is very much the gentleman—well-bred, all that you know, more like foreign men,—an Englishman of good family.”

In a few moments Jack returned to the subject.

“Why are the Mathers better than the others? You treat them differently. Every one does here. You were ashamed to know me the other day when I was with the hotel crowd, just because the Mathers happened to be there.”

“You *are* a boy,” Miss Mason laughed back, not disturbed at his accusation. “I suppose it’s because most of us are *nouveaux*, and the General has real position. That’s something you can’t buy all at once. See?”

Jack nodded. His next remark was quite as blunt as the former.

“Are you much older than I am? You seem young and old. When you’re with folks,—people,”—he cor-

rected his idiom, — “you are as old as the rest, but with me —”

“I’m nearly twenty,” Miss Mason answered soberly. “You haven’t seen as much as I have, and a woman’s older anyway.”

“I wish you would tell me —”

He was about to say something that he already recognized would be rude, but refrained.

“What is it you wanted to ask me?” she said, settling back in her seat as if she had forgotten the Neck.

“Why were you so — horrid the other night at Clear Lake? You despised those folks, — people, — and you despised me for being there. But I’m no better than they are. We are all as good as the next, I guess,” he ended belligerently, with the American faith in pure democracy.

“That’s all rot,” the girl answered calmly. “Are *those* the people you want to live with? Do you expect to grow up here and marry one of them, a kitchen girl, out of this hotel? I don’t believe it. I knew from the moment I saw you that *you* weren’t that kind. Now, don’t talk any nonsense about their being as good as ourselves. Of course they are in the Constitution and before God, but in the eyes of man they *aren’t*. The first thing for *you* to learn is that they *aren’t* like you, that your life is going to be lots bigger, richer, stronger, more interesting, than theirs. And the sooner you feel that, the luckier for you.”

The boy looked at her in simple amazement, and she continued authoritatively: —

“I’ve been all through that. Out in Zenobia, Ohio,

where we used to live, I wasn't so very different from Sadie and Ruth. We had an ugly, pine-shingled Queen Anne house upon a clay road back of the town. It was filled with Grand Rapids stuff, — chairs and tables and hideous carved things, like hotel furniture, — you know what that is? We knew the people of the place, — all there were, — but that wasn't much. Mother knew more than father about — the other kind of life; and *she* sent me away to school to Pitthampton. That didn't do much good: most of the girls were like me, — only had more money. Then papa made some money, and mother and I went to Europe. Oh! I've seen a bit of the world. I've been all around, living in hotels for months, years almost; and I have learned to know my way among people a little. Do you suppose *I* could afford to be chummy with Sadie and Ruth and you, and the Mathers standing around, and saying to themselves; 'That's *her* kind'? Not yet!"

"So you like only rich people."

Miss Mason looked at Jack contemptuously; her energetic exposition had been thrown away. Just then the boat grated on the gravel shore of Seal Island, and Jack helped his companion over the boulder-strewn beach. They climbed the cliffs to the cool shade of the big firs, and then crossed the island and gained the massive, rocky fortress which breasted the open seas. The swell boomed beneath them in the hollows of the granite, flinging upward salty spume. The girl settled herself in the sunny lee of a rock and resumed the topic where they had broken off.

"No! I don't like only rich people, or swell people. I like you a lot, when you aren't silly!"

She looked into his earnest face without a trace of coquetry.

"And I am going to tell you some things which you will have to learn, — things you ought to know already. There are somebodies and nobodies in this world, and if you've got any spirit in you, you want to be a somebody."

"What's the use of being a somebody?" Jack asked rather meekly.

The girl looked at him impatiently.

"Do you have to *ask* that? What's the use of living? do you have to be told that? Why, we Americans have the most glorious chance that ever was. Do you see, — people like you and me, just plain people from nowhere with nothing behind them, with money or without if necessary, — *we* can do what we like. We can be what we like. We can know the people we want to — we can conquer the world, if we are big enough."

She stopped breathlessly.

"Perhaps," Jack assented dubiously. The glowing phrases hadn't much significance for him. "Do you mean to conquer the world?" he asked naïvely

"Yes, yes; a thousand times!" she laughed back. "Watch me! There are a dozen worlds I can't know now; but wait! I'm only twenty, and I have fifteen years to go this way, that way. I shall marry. Of course I shall marry. I shall try this and that, but I shall come out!"

She shook her head, half playfully.

"And you?" she asked soberly. "A man has so much more chance."

"I must learn something."

"College is only the beginning—mere nothing. What will you do *after*, that's it. Will you be content to sit around here,—lawyer, doctor, hotel-keeper? Do you feel strong enough to get down into the fight in the big rings? Can you make money, and make the little men buckle under to you, and the women give you what you want? That's what it is to be a man!"

The strong spirit of the girl's will fired the youth, supple to impulse from woman as man has been from the beginning.

"So that is the other world!" he murmured, his eyes staring into the fog-banks.

"*This* world, my friend," the girl said excitedly. "Oh, of course, there are other things: being good, *excessively* good, and sacrifice, and religion, and all that. But I don't believe a man who is a man ever feels the call that way first hand. He wants to triumph, to fight with his fellows. Don't you?"

And in the glamour of the moment, Jack answered literally:—

"Yes! And if I win—"

"I shall be proud to know you, and I'll help you—and a woman *can* help—an American woman—"

"And if I fail?" he asked curiously.

The girl shrugged her shoulders dramatically. "I never know failures!"

There was a touch of hardness in her voice, but the

fresh words that poured tumultuously forth destroyed the impression.

"But there *is* no failure—pluck, some brains, health—you've all those. And then a fair field, some money to get, some stupid thousands of men and women to drive your way. Oh! what a lovely country is ours! I could wish to have been born a man, if I hadn't been a woman."

She laughed at her own wild mood.

"Come, we must be friends—" she held out her hand. "You'll get blue. You won't think it pays. You'll see a nice little Ruth in the lane some day, and when she puts her head on your shoulders, you'll think you want to marry her—and that would be the end of you. Remember what I say: there's nothing like being a *nouveau*, if you've got the wit and the grit to make the world accept you. As I mean it shall!" she ended more meditatively, her gray eyes staring out at the empty horizon. Then the humor of her words rushed over her, and she laughed buoyantly. "My! what a big talk I've been giving you! But you see, your situation interests me. You and I are rather by the way of being in the same boat. My career is as much to make as yours."

The young fellow listened abashed, unconscious of the erratic frankness, the egotism, the maturity and immaturity of the girl. When she paused, he said simply:—

"I wish you would tell me—more, what you mean by 'career'—tell me all you've done. I want to know you."

The gray eyes rested on his eager face for a few contemplative moments. The mobile mouth smiled at his simplicity and boyishness. Something in his direct,

ignorant manner, however, appealed to the woman ; something in her own restless, self-absorbed soul prompted her to confidence.

Jack Pemberton never forgot those wonderful hours on the sea-washed rocks, just above the insistent grumble of the ocean. The girl — woman, rather — told him the story of her drifting life, from Zenobia, Ohio, and New York to Pau and Trouville and Paris, Dresden, Rome, and London. Such wonderful talk he had never heard, such pictures of many new and strange people, as he saw in the vivid, slangy phrases of this girl ! She described the men of Zenobia where her father had his silver-plate factory, the New York school where she had first learned social distinctions, the New York hotels that reeked with lavish expenditure, the Americans — men and women — who wander like a herd of semi-domesticated cattle across the face of Europe ! Mr. Mason's fortunes had bobbed up and down. When they were low, the wife and daughter had flitted to Europe, and when they were high, they had come back to New York hotels and restaurants, — lavish temporary quarters where they lived as they lived in Europe, ever suspecting some new mandate of fortune. There were many acquaintances of the table d'hôte, or hotel veranda, and few friends. The brother had been sent to St. Jacques, and was now in Harvard, — a fact which explained the appearance of the family in Pemberton Neck.

The girl had relished this salad existence, welcoming

change, content with the temporary aspect of things. Hitherto she had lived on the outskirts of society, but now, with irresistible charm and gallant will, she was contemplating a new campaign, the significance of which Jack could but partially realize.

"So," she concluded, "you can see that our friends, the Mathers, are important to me. As I told you, they are somebodies, and I am tired of nobodies."

There may have been a suspicion in the young fellow's mind that her brilliant summary of the ends of living was inadequate on some sides; that it might be enough to be strong and tender and fine without seeking the rich foods of the world. But he would have put the idea from his mind. What was good in her eyes would be his good.

While they had talked, the sun had dipped beyond the purple crests of Green Hill, leaving a cold, black shadow on the rocks. Miss Mason sprang up, exclaiming:—

"You've made me miss my dinner, and Mr. Cushing is there! Come, take me home!" she commanded with a new intimacy in her tone.

"I should have been at the hotel hours ago," he rejoined, luxuriating in his freedom.

"What will they do to you?"

"The clerk will row me," he admitted. "But I don't care. I never was so happy in my life. Things mean so much more now."

The girl laughed joyously. Her eyes danced with the glory of this new conquest, this new possession, and with a little mockery of herself and of him.

"Well, then," she said, "you will have to take dinner

with me, and give the clerk something more to row you about."

They found the boat afloat, and the rocks on which they had landed, under water. Jack turned to the girl with more confidence than he had ever displayed.

"I shall have to carry you."

Lifting her in his arms, he strode out into the water toward the boat, seeking carefully his footing on the slippery rocks. She made no protests, expressed no self-conscious pruderies, but held the young fellow's shoulders firmly, studying his earnest face with her keen eyes. The complete confidence and simplicity of the girl touched a fresh chord of tenderness in him. He would have borne her thus steadily for long miles, until his strength gave out. As he placed her gently in the stern of the boat she murmured appreciatively:—

"What a strong man!"

He wrapped her deftly in a rug, for the wind had freshened, and tucked cushions here and there. It was not love—this exquisite pleasure of serving. He did not know the first step of love, and if he had, such a consciousness toward this girl, who seemed to lean down to him from some more brilliant star, would have made him sneer at himself. It was not love; but if she had needed it, he would have taken out his strong heart and handed it to her to play with.

As the little boat floated up to the landing stage in the evening shadows, Miss Mason leaned forward impulsively.

"We're such good friends, aren't we?"

Jack merely nodded, not knowing any fit words.

CHAPTER X

"ELSIE's cub," Cushing called him, with a laugh that was full of *sous-entendu* for men. Mather, in response to the phrase, smiled contemptuously. Secretly he thought as poorly of Cushing as of the cub; Elsie's crowd were all rather common. Yet he had taken more vacation than usual this summer, and had spent most of it at the Neck.

"Yes, my cub," the girl took up the phrase as a challenge; "and, see here, Bushy, you are a wise man: be nice to the cub. That's all!"

Cushing, who had just snubbed young Pemberton, flicked his glasses, and Miss Mason, with rising color, continued:—

"Yes; he's only a country boy, — he's nobody, — you won't tread on anybody's toes if you are small and mean to him; except mine."

"*Ami des femmes!*" interpolated Mather, trying to break what he would call the girl's rowdy mood.

This interruption won a bitter glance from the gray eyes.

"I say, Bushy, you *shall* be nice to him. What are we? — What am I? What are *you*? His name is better than mine, and maybe some day, Bushy, you and I shall be glad we can say we knew him. Nonsense! I don't mean that — that's snobby and cheap, and *he* isn't

that. Do you know any one in our acquaintance who has that head — ”

“*And those clothes.*”

“*And those shoulders.*”

“I hear he’s going to Harvard,” added Mather. “He’ll have rather a dull time.”

“Why should he? He’s got twice the stuff in him Frank has, or — ”

“Ned?” Mather suggested. “Well, you see cleverness hasn’t much to do with having a good time in this world.”

“No!” the girl admitted bitterly. “Worse luck!” And for that speech Roger Mather counselled his sister not to be too intimate in her farewells. “They’ve come here to get in. She’s clever and clear sport—but loud, and the mother and father! You don’t want to shoulder them in New York.”

The women had arrived at this conclusion independently. Elsie Mason, her best friends admitted, was “loud”; the older feminine critics said “vulgar.” Miss Chesney, who stood midway in liberality, held that her honesty was always giving her needless reprobation. “She is so loud that you can hear her a block off, but she is amusing and she knows better. Some day when it suits her fancy she will be the primest thing in life.”

No one accused her of being sentimental or flirtatious, although she was intimate with men rather than with women. She treated all men with the brusque honesty, the unsexual frankness, that she had shown to the boy,

"You're too ambitious to care for one man," Cushing told her once, with the smart of having followed her in vain since she was a child.

"Because *you* don't meet my ambition?" she had retorted imperturbably.

And he wondered what her figure might be, as he crassly phrased it.

If she had not conciliated the critical spirits of Pemberton Neck, her brother Frank had made ample amends. He had attached himself to Ned Mather at St. Jacques, and thanks to the Mather influence had "made the Dickey" and was on the right road at Harvard. He had selected Pemberton Neck for his family, because of the Mathers, the Chesneys, the Sewalls, and other good people, who had had places there ever since the north shore existed. To his disappointment, Elsie had succeeded only indifferently in establishing the same cordial relations that he enjoyed with these people. The men flocked about her, but the women looked at her coldly across tea-tables. Frank was popular all along the coast from Nahant to Campobello. He was a pretty boy, with regular features, a perpetual smile, and an apparently frank manner. He could do passably well all outdoor sports, sing a little, and write a little music. His sister's freakish interest in the young clerk at the hotel was absolutely incomprehensible to him. Since he had turned fifteen there had existed for him but one class of people, —those worth knowing. And with all the pertinacity of the good parasite, he inserted his tendrils here and there in the crannies of the strong social wall.

He was attentive to Isabelle Mather, and his sister helped him with the girl where she could. Brother and sister had a tacit agreement about their various purposes. But hers were the larger views.

"You must have courage enough to know the unknown," she said to him these days, observing his supercilious politeness to Jack. "Until you are strong enough to be daring you won't arrive. Isabelle would be the first to detect your little weakness, brother."

Likewise, when their genial father arrived to spend the last days of the season with his family, she gloried in him almost ostentatiously, while Frank was unpleasantly conscious of Mr. Mason's evident inferiority to the distinguished General, whose daughter he sought. There was something in the gambling, roving nature of the Ohio manufacturer that the daughter shared. He had won and lost two small fortunes since he had sold the silver-plate business and moved from Zenobia to New York. Elsie remembered how, three years before, he had announced his second reverse jovially at the dinner-table over a glass of champagne.

"I'm cleaned out, old girl."

While Mrs. Mason was absorbing the horror of the news, Elsie had kissed her father's fat cheeks, saying:—

"You dear thing, stop your poker and don't make us beggars. Mamma will go over to Aix this time."

And with many sighs Mrs. Mason had packed her eight trunks and, leaving Frank at Harvard, had gone obediently to Aix. There Elsie had had affairs with men, and finally, in consternation, Mrs. Mason had packed

her trunks hastily, and they had sailed to New York, Mr. Mason welcoming them on the dock as jovially as he had sped them the year before. He was making money once more, he said, and that summer they had gone for the first time to Pemberton Neck. The following summer, as Mr. Mason continued to make money, they had rented the Peters' cottage. Cushing was one of the few people whom the family knew that Mr. Mason also knew; and if it had not been for Cushing, the fat, white-haired little man would have been at a loss for diversion in Pemberton Neck, so far from his two daily games. He understood Cushing, who knew how to make money, and whenever Mr. Mason visited his family, Cushing was more intimate than ever at the Peters' cottage.

All these people Jack watched and wondered about, trying to relate them one to another, — trying especially to connect them with the girl, who seemed infinitely better than them all. And in the hours he spent at the Masons' cottage or out on the sea with this young woman, who had seen her little world pretty thoroughly, he learned more than the years at the university would teach him. He read her half phrases and searched her mobile face for the interpretation of what he saw but could not understand in that little social pool of rich Americans. After the Mathers left, he had her society when he sought it. His absolute admiration and unspoken devotion pleased the egotism of the girl. He was but a boy, she may have said to herself. But a stronger reason for her freedom with him was that they

were Americans, equal before the social struggle, with a similar homely past, with similar possibilities.

Those rare autumn days! In some clear, sunlit Olympus like this the gods must sit to meditate the mysterious joy of creation, the youth thought, and he was conscious of treading in their footsteps. Pain and perplexity later, labor and strife and sullen discontent, — they must return; but three, five, six days of a free spirit unleashed, with the dream of strange events to come, — who would not stand like a man and suffer later the pangs of disillusion? The boy in the youth was ignorant of the woman's cleverness; the man in him cherished her sweetest qualities. That she liked him, that he saw her daily for long hours, — was that not matter for lasting gratitude?

The black water of the north sea laps a cold, bleak shore. The firs, rain-soaked, shrouded in mist, rise stiff and dark above the black rocks. For days, sometimes weeks, when the rest of the world basks in the languid south wind, the North Shore is gloomy and fog-ridden. But it has its own recompense when the fog-banks are driven far out into the gray sea, when the tide murmurs sweetly against the little islands, when the clear sun-mellowed air throws an enchantment over the homely coast. The human eye has the feeling that it can see far into the distance. Remote trees and rocks stand out with the sharp relief of marble. Then an intoxication possesses the blood, not the carnal bedevilment of drink or drug, but a quiet, happy conviction that the spirit sees and feels. The incumbent heavy consciousness, the

weary weight of flesh are lifted: one breathes, one knows the power of life!

The afternoon of the last day they were returning from a long drive over the hills of Green Bay. They had risen slowly at a walk out of a spacious inland plateau of waving, many-colored trees and lingered on the stony crest before turning down the steep road to the shore. Behind them in the murmuring trees the black shadows of the autumn night were playing, but a few last golden streaks of sunlight illuminated the dusky islands of the Bay. The still, searching beauty of this piece of the world shone in the girl's face, which was unwontedly passive.

"I never liked the neck so much as to-day!" she exclaimed.

"You are always happy," Jack commented enviously.

"What's the use of sulking? I wouldn't give in, not if we lost every cent. I know what it is to be poor and to be snubbed. Let 'em all talk —"

She restrained herself, but Jack knew what she meant. He, too, was outside of this sleek little world below them.

"Shall you come back another summer? Shall I see you?" he asked rather shamefacedly.

"Perhaps — who knows? Frank likes it —"

"You're the first real person I ever knew." He spoke to himself. She looked at him wonderingly, ignorant of the bleak spiritual experience that the boy was trying to express.

"The first person who is real and what you want her to be," he stammered on.

She took it as a bizarre compliment, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"Wait — think of all that's coming!"

"Oh yes, crowds of people," he agreed, with the assumption of youth, "but not this."

She suspected sentiment and drew off bluffly.

"If you don't forget, come to see me in New York."

"No! I'd rather do something first, make some sort of a place, so those people — every one won't think I am out of it."

"Silly! What do you care for them?"

"Nothing here, but a lot when they're around."

"Why, if you run about a little and dress like them and see what they're doing, you'll be just like them. And then I shan't care a fig for you."

"You aren't that kind!" the young fellow replied promptly.

"I don't know what kind I am — I'm every kind."

"You don't seem happy now," he said gently.

"Look at that partridge! You could have hit it with a stick. There goes another, and another!"

She dropped the reins in her excitement, but Jack paid no attention to the covey of partridges that scuttled over the road.

"I wish you'd tell me what's the matter," he persisted.

"You wouldn't understand," she answered peremptorily.

Jack turned red slowly, painfully, and raised his deep brown eyes resentfully to the girl's face.

"I shouldn't have said that," Elsie added, quickly

laying her hand on his; "for you understand *almost* everything, and are the greatest dear in the world."

The young fellow touched the horse impatiently with the whip; the animal sprang forward down the rocky road. The cart rocked and swayed, and the girl had all she could do to guide it around the sharp turns of the wooded road.

"Don't do that again," she said, when the horse settled into a fast trot over a level piece of road.

"Don't say that again," Jack responded haughtily.

"No! I won't ever again—Jack," she whispered teasingly, her head swaying close to his. "You goose!"

And he raged, like the youth he was, at the feeling of his real remoteness from this woman. When they came to close quarters she withdrew into a cloudland of multi-form experience, where Bushy and Roger Mather and Miss Chesney and many others were at home. He merely looked over the fence.

"You must come to see me," she repeated soon, nestling unconsciously closer to him in the eagerness of her sympathy. "You will? I'll take you to the theatre and show you the great ones in evening undress. I'll have you meet the tiniest buds in the world, and you'll fall desperately in love, and it will be quite hopeless, you know, for they won't look at you, — no matter how clever you are, — not a bud of this generation, — less than fifty thousand a year. And it will take you years and years to —"

"Will fifty thousand satisfy *you*?" Jack asked.

She paused in her breathless gabble to think.

"If he is the right sort, — good style, good family, — correct in all points, why —"

"Roger Mather, for instance?"

"Don't be impertinent! If he is all that, I might try to get along on something less, but for the ordinary run — fifty is the very least."

Jack looked at her critically to see whether she was serious.

"And I'm not worldly, not one little bit. But you don't know how nasty it's been — not having money, being snubbed, and skipping about from hotel to hotel — not much!" She ended with a grimace.

"But I thought you had money," Jack persisted literally.

"Rather more than Miss Sadie, or Miss Ruth."

Jack nettled, and she added more seriously: —

"Frank takes an awful lot, and —"

"I didn't know people had to have so much money to be happy."

"You don't understand."

"There seems to be a lot I don't understand," he growled.

"There is, just dead loads. When you come to New York, I'll try to make you understand a little."

"Isn't it possible *this* is better?" he asked.

Her lip trembled. The boy had touched a remote chord. The desire for peace that lies beneath the miscellaneous impulses of a healthy nature made itself felt for one moment.

"Perhaps!" she admitted. "No! That's just plain

rot. Good for failures and middle-aged people and invalids. Don't think poetry, Jack. Remember, to enjoy poetry you must know the other kind of thing. Will you write me, too?" She changed the theme briskly. "I like you clear through, and I don't want to lose sight of you. Maybe I can help you some day."

"And I you?" he asked.

"You do! You make me feel just right, just myself. Now I'm going to call on your aunt, while you drive over to the store for the mail."

Jack thanked the girl with a glance, and helped her to dismount. When he returned with the mail he could see her eager face through the little front window behind the hollyhocks. She was talking in the same absorbed, animated fashion that he loved. He waited five, ten, fifteen minutes, watching her, until at last she appeared, accompanied by the heavy form of his aunt. He could see that Aunt Julia had been conquered by the irresistible human charm of the girl, and was responding in her lumbering way to the sympathetic touch.

"Hope we're agoin' to see you in Pemberton Neck next season," Aunt Julia rolled out in her broad tones, as she plucked a handful of flowers from the garden strip. "It's been real nice to watch you drivin' past."

"I shan't drive past next year," the girl retorted swiftly.

"That's right," Aunt Julia laughed. "Drive right up and hitch here."

"Good-by, Jack," the girl said, as Jack carefully covered her feet with the robe. She stretched out her

hand, and as her fingers closed warmly about his hand, the young fellow answered:—

“Good-by, Elsie.”

“See you soon,” she called back over her shoulder, as the cart rolled into the road.

The girl swung her lash lightly above the mare and called to her cheerily as if speaking to an old friend. The mare responded with a long stride, and the last word Jack caught was the cheerful, “Step lively, Molly,” almost drowned in the rattle of the wheels. He stood watching until the erect figure disappeared into the dark gulf of the arching trees.

He stood on, alone, to catch the last echoes of the trap. The cold autumn night had shut in, hiding the islands in the Bay, leaving the broad stretches of inner waters black as bottomless pools. In the frosty stillness of the evening the slap of the tidal swells resounded sharply against the rocks. Color and warmth had faded from the beautiful land, but his heart held a warm glow that could never fade. The purest devotion a man ever gives to woman, the devotion of youth, that asks nothing, hopes for nothing, gives all and gets little, filled him with happiness.

CHAPTER XI

"HAD your supper, Jack?" His uncle stepped quietly out of the shadow of the shed.

"No!" the boy answered.

"Been out with that girl up to the Neck?"

"Yes," he said shortly, disliking the homely directness of his uncle's reference to Miss Mason.

"Seen a good deal of her lately?" the little man continued, running his finger under his suspenders and stretching his slippered feet apart. As Jack said nothing, he added: "And there's Ruth, and Sade, and maybe others — just like your father!"

"What do you mean?" Jack demanded sternly.

The fisherman spat carefully beyond the well-brushed gravel path, and said: —

"Time you knew, Jack; time you knew, now you're goin' off to college much like Arthur. 'Twas the gels that ruined him! I ain't sayin' nothin' agin wimen. When the time comes, you'll want to marry a good gel, and maybe Ruth's good's the rest, maybe Sade. But your father didn't wait till the right time! He was a great hand with the gels at the church parties. There wan't no summer folks then, so's the wimen folk were all of a kind, like us. And I kin remember," he con-

tinued, spitting again, "when I was a little feller, seein' Arthur goin' off drivin' with the gels, and berryin', and choir practice, — seems he was allus after 'em —"

"Well, I haven't seen much of them, — Sadie or Ruth or the rest," Jack interrupted in cold disgust, "and I don't see what you're telling me this for."

"So's to warn yer, Jack," the little man continued stubbornly. "There was never a brother loved a brother more'n I loved Arthur. I'd a put myself in that there road, and let him drive over me, but I seed what ruined him. It was gels — wimen. And now you're doin' much like he did. He went off up to Boston, and the next thing we know'd he married one of 'em. She hooked him 'fore he knew what he wanted, and she coted him, 'cause why? 'Cause she thought a lot of herself; 'cause she put on airs; 'cause her folks thought themselves *fine* — like this one."

Jack squirmed at the abrupt application of the moral.

"Now I don't want to say no more 'bout your mother. But leave gels alone till you're a man ripe, and then don't go hangin' bout folks that are too fine for yer. You're goin' to college agin my advice, and you kin take *this* advice or leave it, as you like."

He walked away to the barn, his natural waddling gait emphasized by the passion of unusual speech. Jack stood, stunned by the savagery of the words, inclined to resent them. It seemed as if a dirty rag had been drawn carelessly across a delicate picture in his mind. All the exquisite outlines with which his imagination had painted this one woman had been fouled. And his memory of

his father had been fouled, 'too,—a definite cause for that pitiful failure suggested, an idea that would lie and fester in his mind. He could not cease to wonder how literally the words should be taken, to what extremities his father's weakness had led him. *He* had been innocent of wrong, except so far as he had taken joy from this beautiful girl. With a scowl he started down the path toward the shore; his aunt put her head out of the back door, and called, "Jock, Jock, don't you want no supper?"

He turned back and went to his supper in the little kitchen. As he said nothing, his aunt suggested various topics.

"I packed your trunk, Jock."

"Thank you."

"How much money have you?"

"About two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Will that be enough?"

"Guess it will have to be, if I can't get some more down there."

"I've quite a bit saved up, one way and another—"

"No, Aunt Julia," he interrupted quickly. "You and Uncle John don't believe in this that I'm going to do, and I shouldn't feel right in taking your money."

"Well," she drawled slowly, "you needn't look at it that way. John is a bit uneasy 'count of your father, but I guess—"

"What was the matter with my father?" Jack demanded sharply.

"I doan't know as there was much," Aunt Julia replied

gently. "He was kind of sweet on the gurls, and I guess, as you know, his marryin' —"

"Did he ever do any girl any harm?" Jack asked, putting down his knife and fork.

"I doan't know. Your cousin Cyrus' folks talk about some girl, a Maxwell, over at Brooksville, — but 'tain't nothin' but talk. I shouldn't let *that* fear you. Your poor father, God rest him, had enough trouble 'fore he died. He was kind of lively and gay and loved company — I guess that was just all. There was your great-uncle Ferdinand — he by all accounts *was* a hard one."

Jack made her tell the village stories about the adventurous Ferdinand, who had attempted to keep two establishments, and had come to grief. That led to other tales of Pembertons, a web of provincial intrigue that connected the different generations of Puritan licentiousness, — repressed decently, but ever reappearing, avenging the asceticism of one generation by the overstrung nerves of the second. The young fellow sat before his food, but did not eat. He leaned his elbows on the kitchen table and loosened the coarse flannel shirt to give his neck freedom, and stared out of the little window into the dark fields. His black hair grew thickly down the nape of his neck and around his neck to the breast. His arms had thickened and toughened like northern saplings, and bronzed under the sun. The youth's form was swelling into the man's mould, and the leaping red blood pushed and tingled over the body, filling him with the vital consciousness of life. His face burned red, as he listened, and of the broken threads

of old stories he pieced out life-histories, tragedies of family . . .

From out these stony, barren fields sprang this people of his, hard and rough like the ledges of their coast, but with this strange incentive to animal indulgence. In the heat of his fancy he saw them all, — all his people, — soft, sensual, yielding, — some few repressing their sensuality, only to have it descend a greater burden of flesh to their children.

He knew now the thrill, the temptation that had come unknown, the moonlight night when he had sat with his arm half clasping the little waitress. And his aunt and uncle put down his joy in Miss Mason to the same corrupt root. He drew himself up from the table with a gesture of powerful, deep disdain, as if he would take this vision of kindly beauty and bear it away to some inner sanctuary where the ignorant could not blow upon it.

“That Mis’ Mason,” his aunt observed at last, conscious of his tense expression and anxious to get his thoughts into pleasanter channels, — “that Mis’ Mason is a most amusin’ child, and as nice a one as I ever saw.”

“Don’t speak about her,” Jack ordered harshly. “I shall never see her again.”

His aunt stared in amazement at the unaccustomed anger in his tone, but like the wise woman of the people that she was kept her peace in ignorance.

BOOK II

YOUTH

CHAPTER I

"It's no kind of a mix-up. I've seen a dozen boys just in from the plains that could run the whole push into the lock-up. Now it's beginning to rain, they'll all go home and change their neckties."

Jack laughed at the whimsical growling of the fellow. He had strolled over to the "yard" from his room to see the antics of "bloody Monday night," and had been disgusted, as was this brawny stranger, by the half-hearted, feeble endeavors of a few freshmen and sophomores to observe an old tradition of the place. The big stranger, who had spoken to him from the necessity to free his mind frankly to some one, continued:—

"Here, I've lost a new hat and had my collar-button torn out,—the worst I could do. I guess the old man's drool this morning took the ginger out of 'em. But if they're going to be good and not act like naughty boys, *why* don't they keep out; and if they're not going to be grown-up and dignified as the Prex told 'em to, *why* don't they pitch in and hustle?"

"Are you new here?" Jack asked.

"Yes. First time I ever smelled salt water. And it's given me a cold in my head. There's no use slopping 'round here in the wet. Let's move on."

The feeble mob of undergraduates that had been pushing aimlessly here and there was breaking up dis-

heartened. Jack sauntered off with his new acquaintance, immensely pleased to hear the sound of a human voice addressed to him after five days of complete loneliness.

"Come up to my room, won't you?" he suggested timidly, as the rain pattered insistently among the autumn leaves of the old elms.

"Whereabouts?" the stranger demanded.

"College House, top floor," Jack responded, as yet unconscious of the social inadequacy of his quarters.

The two scrambled up the dingy stairs of the old brick hall; Jack opened the door of his tiny room, turned up the gas, and wheeled eagerly to look at his companion.

"Stevenson, — Jeff Stevenson," the big fellow explained, falling into a chair and stretching out his hands to the little grate fire. "And you're Pemberton, 18 —, saw it on the door while you were hunting for a match. I'm from Mound City, Iowa. Where are you from?"

"Pemberton Neck, Maine," Jack responded.

"So? Got a place named for you? Well, they named a little two-story shanty, saloon, and stock-house up in the woods, Stevenson, after the old man; but it hasn't grown much, — guess it never will."

Stevenson had a pleasant, big voice, all in the lower register. It reminded Jack of the bellow of the waves on the rocks of Seal Island as it came to land softened by the fog bank. His large, bony frame fitted the voice and also his huge feet, two of which, side by side, occupied the hearth, and his long, broad, hairy hands. A

thick growth of hair came far down on his forehead, and was met over the cheek bones by two wide, black streaks where the beard was shaved. A mustache curved above the large mouth. The chief thing about the man — he was obviously older than the average freshman — was the liberal scale of his physique. It was not until Jack stood off from him that he realized how handsome he was in spite of the heavy lines. His big, brown eyes peering out under the thatch of hair burned with kindly warmth.

“What are you doing for yourself?” Stevenson asked slowly. “I’ve been running ’round to see the profs, but they seem too busy to pass the time of day. Every one hereabouts is just wiggling for all he’s worth; so I gave it up, and just trot here and there and look at things. Been to Concord and Bunker Hill. It’s mighty different around here.”

“What’s Mound City?” Jack asked, immensely interested in this careless, casual person.

“Oh! just a crossroads where the road headquarters are, and the shops, and all that. It’s goin’ to be the prettiest town of its size in the state. Ever been West?”

Jack shook his head.

“You should see a Red River Valley farm — my old man owns two or three big ones, and I’ve been up there harvestin’ times. Why, on one of them we keep five experts just riding about fixing the machines.”

The big fellow lounged back in the chair and closed his eyes, as if he were dreaming of the level golden

plains with the music of the reapers in his ears. He talked on; from anybody else Jack would have called it brag, but from Stevenson it was only the egotistic overflow of a powerful, zestful nature.

"When the boys went to school, — Michigan, Cornell, Kansas, and so on, — I went into railroadin'," he ended. "Only last year the old man fixed his business up so as I could be free. And I thought I'd see what it was like here. I read a good deal in the papers about Harvard, and when I had a chance to choose I took Harvard."

Jack's own tale seemed tame to him in comparison with the hard-working years that Stevenson had spent on the wheat farm and in the railroad offices of Mound City. The black-browed Westerner with his massive, gentle face had already tasted many of the joys of a man's life.

"What are *you* going to do?" Stevenson asked abruptly.

"I don't know. There are so many things in this place to study, I don't even know where to begin."

"I went through their prospectus with the old man, and we picked out about a couple of dozen courses. I'm down for six this year. What's your line?"

"Nothing particular," Jack replied evasively. "Languages, I guess, at first. I expect to waste a year finding out what I want. I didn't come just for the courses."

The big fellow looked puzzled, and Jack was too timid to explain what he meant. They talked on into the quiet hours of the rainy night, like two imaginative

boys, sounding each other, discovering the capes of dissimilar experience, laying the broad foundations of friendship. Stevenson took off his coat and collar and rolled up his shirt sleeves to cool his big body. He talked like a massive engine that had its business in the world to do, and played in the joyous heat of its performance.

"Well," he said at last, "I'd bunk in with you right here, but your quarters are kind of small." It was not said in criticism, and Jack offered no apology. In truth, there was only a narrow iron bed shut off in a corner by a calico curtain, a table, two chairs, and a strip of carpet. "I live over the other end of the town. Where do you feed? At the great trough in the Hall? Well, I'll see you there to-morrow, and we'll try to fix it so's to get together at table,—if agreeable to you."

When he had gone, and his heavy tread sounded loudly from the old staircase, which he covered three steps at a time, Jack Pemberton walked back and forth as if to shake himself awake. The vital, physical presence of the young man still remained in the room, and stirred him like a hearty clap on the shoulder. He opened the window and looked out. Stevenson was pulling up his coat collar and ramming the felt hat Jack had lent him firmly on his head. Then he started up the avenue out of the square, walking leisurely as if a Cambridge drizzle had no terrors. Jack watched him until his broad shoulders faded into the damp night.

He stood there by the window, gazing into the deserted square, where the big electric light cast a blue blur over

the wet roadway. The streets were muddy, and the college buildings across the way were shrouded in the cold mist, yet for the first day since his arrival in Cambridge the place painted itself large in his imagination. It was like coming across the form of a young god in a new country — this finding of Stevenson.

The next morning the sky was washed cold and blue; there was a feeling of distant, frosty hills in the air. The beautiful New England autumn had set in. Jack hurried over to the dining hall, the first love for the old place stirring in his heart. He had been assigned a seat in that vast establishment with a number of other nondescript youths that had as yet no companions. In the bustle of the great hall, with the steam of the food clouding the big stained-glass windows, the perpetual stream of students in and out, the tables loaded with used dishes, Jack sat and watched the scene. The youth next him, a pale, near-sighted chap, who ate as if all food were the same thing, had propped his morning paper on the water-pitcher and buried himself unsociably in its folds. Jack looked him over, trying to place him. He was more of the student than any man he had yet seen; he was dressed with the greatest economy, evidently, his black, ready-made clothes having been brushed until they shone.

As the stranger turned the newspaper, Jack noticed that he stopped the mechanical process of shovelling in his breakfast and stared at the lines of print in front of him. He did not seem to read; he did not turn the newspaper, to the discomfort of Jack, who was furtively

gathering the news of a great yacht race. Finally, Jack rose and left his neighbor staring with unseeing eyes at the heavy black lines of the *Herald*. As he sauntered out of the smelly hall into the marble-paved transept, the October sunlight shot through the open doors, lighting the memorial tablets. Jack stopped and read the names, passing on from tablet to tablet with its simple record of forgotten heroes. This contribution of the university to the national life suddenly meant something to him: Antietam, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness,—odd names, crude names, beautiful names,—more penetrating than Marathon, or Philippi, or Agincourt! The names of the men were recorded in little black letters that sank coldly into the angular marble tablets:—

John Errant.

Andrew Nixon.

Benjamin F. Pauling.

Another tablet:—

Amos Durant.

Edward Sewall Mather, Captain.

That must be a relative of his classmate, young Mather! The last time he had seen Ned Mather he was superintending the loading of his polo ponies on the *Northern Star* at the Neck. Jack wondered if Mather had ever stood beneath this record of honor. Thirty years before almost to the day of the month, Captain Edward Sewall Mather, who was then barely twenty, had left Harvard with his regiment, and two years later was shot at Gettys-

burg. Jack passed on, reading the names, many of which were familiar and honored throughout New England.

A broad streak of violet light waved across the marble floor. The students came thickly now, hurrying to their morning classes or sauntering to a belated breakfast. These men, he supposed, were much the same as those of the preceding generation, whose names alone were left in this unlovely hall of fame. The freshman standing there in his loneliness and bewilderment and ignorance of what to do with his life, reproached his age for denying *him* the opportunities it had given to these. The crude impatience of youth saw only their heroism!

One of the figures that came through the swinging doors of the dining hall moved over the flags with the dragging step of a somnambulist. It was the fellow who had sat next Jack at breakfast. He carried the *Herald* open in his hand, but his eyes stared above the page into an empty distance. Jack followed him, fascinated by the man's preoccupation. The young student with the paper turned mechanically up the street in the direction of the square. As he crossed the path that led to the big recitation hall, he paused for a moment, and his eyes sought the paper once more. Then he crawled on.

The bell had ceased ringing. Jack had a nine o'clock lecture at Sever Hall, but he followed the fellow with the paper. Some impulse overbore the careful restraint, the habit of not speaking, which Cambridge so quickly teaches; perhaps it was Stevenson's burly example. He touched the quiet little man on his shoulder.

"The bell has just stopped," he said foolishly. "Are you going to English A?"

The man shrank away from the touch suspiciously, and then gave a little wizened laugh.

"I was going somewhere, but I guess I'm not,—ever going anywhere again."

"What's up?" Jack asked, with more assurance.

The little man looked away.

"Oh, nothing!" But his hand trembled until the newspaper fluttered.

"Something in the paper?" Jack asked persistently.

The stranger shoved the paper under his nose. There were the headlines about the yacht race, and side by side a little six-line item about an embezzlement from a country bank. Jack wondered if the fellow had put all his money on the wrong boat, but he rejected the idea; the pale, near-sighted fellow was not that kind.

"The Chicopee Bank," the stranger laughed. "Said to be as strong as a safe. Had all my money,—and now that fellow's got it all."

"That's tough," Jack said sympathetically.

"I guess you'd say so," the little man retorted irritably. "If you'd saved it for five years, working by the hour."

Jack said nothing, but walked along, forgetful of his English recitation.

"For two years I've been proof-reading over in the big printing house by the river, and from the window by my desk I have seen nothing but that tower."

He turned and pointed to the massive, ugly, slate-covered tower of Memorial Hall.

"Is it *all* gone?" Jack ventured to ask.

"I've ten dollars," the fellow answered, "somewhere, if that hasn't been stolen, too."

They were in the Yard, now, and the stranger looked about at the homely old brick buildings with a wistful air.

"I'm glad to have seen it near to, and been a student, if only for two days. I said I wouldn't come over until I had the money in the bank and could be a member. Well, I must go back to Boston."

But he lingered, evidently loath to shut himself up with his stunning disappointment.

"You aren't going to give in?" Jack exclaimed.

The little man laughed drearily; words were cheap.

"Come over with me, I've got a room; it isn't much, but it's paid for. And they say a fellow who is smart can always get on. Perhaps the bank will pay up sometime."

The little man shook his head incredulously. But Jack persisted. Here was a fellow who wanted the courses, who knew what he wanted far more than he did, who had struggled for it, fought for five years! It was preposterous that he should be cheated out of it. So he persuaded Black—Raymond Black was the stranger's name—to come up to his room to talk it over, and to canvass the question of ways and means. He succeeded in having Black put off his flight for that day, and then he went to his eleven o'clock recitation, hoping to run across Stevenson. The big Westerner, he thought, might be helpful.

His mind was busy with this idea, and he paid little attention to the lecture,—a talk on methods of studying history, delivered to a class of four hundred boys, a third of whom could catch the words of the lecturer only occasionally. At the sound of the bell the pent-up youth tumbled gayly out of the stuffy hall. Some hurried over to the library to secure the books mentioned by the lecturer; others straggled to other lectures; but the larger part drifted through the Square into the little cross streets where are the private clubs and the luxurious private dormitories. Jack noticed that these students were the better dressed, more distinctively “college boys,” such as he had seen in the hotel, and he strolled along with them, observing their ease of manner with one another and their dress. They clustered like flies about the billiard rooms and cigar shops on Massachusetts Avenue. He met Mason, and stopped to greet him. Frank Mason called out with a show of cordiality, “Hello, Pemberton,” and asked him how he was “getting on.” As the two talked, Mason’s eyes wandered up and down the street. And from moment to moment he nodded to passing fellows, with the same genial smile,—“Hello, Ned; Hello, Prentiss; Hello, Tom.” He seemed to know the world by the first name.

Jack lingered, without anything to say, merely from the pleasure of seeing Elsie’s brother. In a few moments Mason smiled again and moved on, saying, “Come in some time when you are going by; Claverly is my building.” He evidently meant to be nice to Pemberton. But a man’s acquaintance was like a well-packed bag; it

was boring to be asked to add a superfluous article. Jack thought it would be a long time before he should be passing Claverly way.

As he turned back to the less fashionable quarter of the Square, he caught sight of Stevenson's big form in front of a popular cigar shop. He was looking at some prize cups exhibited in the window, and as Jack hailed him he exclaimed, carrying on the thought that was in his mind: —

"Athletics's the thing here — you want to get out and hustle. I'm going over to the big ranch beyond the creek, and try my luck with the padded breeches. Come on, young feller."

"You'll never make the team," Jack replied pessimistically. "It's always made up beforehand from the men who have been on school teams. You aren't in the set."

Mason had given him a sour feeling that extended to every suggestion. He even doubted whether Black could be helped.

"That's all right," Stevenson answered good-naturedly. "They haven't *seen* me yet. I could push a flat-car up grade this morning."

"Well, I want your advice," Jack said more hopefully. He told Stevenson about the man he had met at Memorial. Stevenson took the little tragedy as a good joke, remarking: "So the cashier skipped with every cent, and the little fellow is landed here strapped? Why don't he get a gun and start for his man?"

"If you saw Black, you'd know why. Besides, we

don't settle those matters so simply here," Jack observed.

When the big man had time to let all sides of the affair penetrate his mind, he sobered enough.

"He mustn't get out—give up like *that* when the game is going the wrong way. Just let him show his nerve and stay in. The bank will pay up some day, or something'll happen. Let's have a look at him!"

In the end Stevenson put heart into the little man, and Jack got Mather's tutor to promise to send him a job. Meantime Stevenson lent him some money to go on with.

"He wants college more than I do," Stevenson remarked—"more'n most, and we'll see he gets it, won't we?"

Jack assented, with a grim sense of humor. His own affairs, he began to realize, were not in the brightest case, but he assimilated something of the big man's broad trust in the future, and looked ahead with a steady glance. About the first thing he did was to order a suit of clothes from one of the Boston tailors that advertised in the college papers. The price of his suit cut deeply into his small hoard, but he said imperterbably to little Black, who gasped at his recklessness:—

"I hate slops, and I've always had slops to wear. I'm going to run on a different gauge here, as Stevenson would call it."

It would be hard to say what is so deeply symbolical to the ambitious American in a new suit of clothes.

CHAPTER II

THE memory of the tablets in Memorial Hall recurred from time to time that first year. He wondered what Ned Mather was doing with himself at Harvard. He had seen him occasionally driving up Massachusetts Avenue, but he had not met him. In the intolerable loneliness of the first months he had thought of calling on him, but his pride, which had grown vastly in the college atmosphere, prevented him. He made few acquaintances; sometimes he envied little Black, who had unerringly formed relations with a few "grinds," — acquaintances made in the class room, at the library, or over borrowed note-books. For Black there seemed to be but one road in life, while he stood confused in the market-place. Stevenson, also, pushed his burly form here and there, attracting acquaintances easily, with a large trust in the future. As for Mason and Mather and the idle men of their set, he supposed they were confident that the future would settle itself, as it had for their fathers and their older brothers, — advantageously.

Meantime, as the year wore on, a more pressing anxiety occupied his thoughts: his little hoard was giving out very fast. The day came when he was ready to acknowledge his defeat and to return to Pemberton Neck quite penniless, but accidentally that evening he found a way to

earn some money. By the close of the year he could make nearly fifteen dollars a week by writing for a Boston newspaper. The chance had come to him through Zimmerman, a young instructor in English, who had read something of the boy's story between the lines of his theme-work. That cape of distress rounded, Jack gained a certain confidence. It was a good thing early in life to walk up close to failure and look it in the face.

Harvard was a silent world for him. Beyond Stevenson, Black, and a rare word with Zimmerman or some other busy instructor, Jack had no occasion to use his tongue. The place began to have the aspect of a city of animated shades, who hourly walked up and down on the brick pavements, and talked and whistled and sang and then reëntered their respective abodes until the old bell rang again. He did not dislike this isolation, for all his conscious life he had lived so largely with shades that he had grown accustomed to silence. Now and then he went to the theatre with Stevenson, who had a passion for the play. After the heat and bad air of the upper gallery they were glad to walk out over the long bridge to Cambridge, discussing, venting the keen impressions of the evening. Jack had the shy desire to write a play, — about wraiths, — and Stevenson's ambition was to know the author of the *Private Detective*, or the actress of the hour.

On one of these occasions they had run across Ned Mather rather drunk and in dispute with some men who were trying to get his money. Stevenson had put the men to flight, and then they had got Mather to Cambridge

in a cab. As they were leaving him at his rooms, he urged them to come in and spend the night with him.

"I can't sleep," he explained, with polite coherence, "and if you wouldn't mind — I hate to be alone. We'll have something cool upstairs, and just talk, until that fool Mason turns up."

Stevenson declined and went away. While Jack hesitated, disliking a drunken cordiality, the young fellow pulled his arm.

"For God's sake, Pemberton, don't leave me! These times I can't stand being alone. I'd, I'd go back to town."

There was something appealing in the gentle, regular features of the boy, a wistfulness that attracted Jack even more than the fine courtesy and amusing irony he had displayed on the drive from town. So Jack steadied Mather's footsteps in the dark hall, and got him into a chair near the window, where the soft April breeze puffed out the heavy curtains. Mather leaned his head wearily on the cushions and closed his eyes. It was a singularly handsome and impassive face, with the sad, youthful expression of a renaissance portrait. Lean and long in feature, heavy-lidded, with luxuriant hair, the head gave a sense of repose, of a wistful inner life that rarely expressed itself in action.

"Nice and calm out there. Nice place here — if you hadn't to bother with things," Mather murmured, his eyes still closed.

"You don't very much," Jack suggested, with growing curiosity.

For reply Mather pointed to the door, which was care-

fully decorated with little oblong cards,—“invitations from the Dean.”

“Another one, and I shall take a vacation,” he commented, with a sigh.

“But it’s easy enough to keep along and not worry one’s self,” Jack remonstrated.

“I suppose so—at least Roger thinks so, and the governor. The tutor put Roger through, but he hasn’t succeeded with me. If one could only care a little —”

He hesitated with the awkwardness of youth in confession. But he had the desire to talk. The fumes of the evening, as they scattered, left his mind singularly clear.

“My people have always been here; never done much, you know. But the governor can’t imagine our not getting the degree. I shall be an awful shock to him. I don’t want the degree. As soon as I can get out of this, I’m going to Carolina or Mexico or some place, and start a ranch. The only thing I care about is horses. Then I’ll come back north at times for polo and a little run in the cities.”

“You’d get sick of that soon,” Jack observed wisely.

“Do you think so? Not much! What’s the use of living up to the other fellow’s ideal, or what you call it? There’s my uncle —”

The simple tablet in Memorial rose before Jack’s eyes, and he listened eagerly.

“He was a sport; only instead of playing polo and going in town, he went to the war and got shot. Suppose I’d do the same thing if I had his chance. They call him a hero, and I’m a plain bum. What’s the difference?”

The idea in the boy's mind was more or less logical, and Jack refrained from protesting.

"They keep me out here, and I make the best of it, kill time when I can."

He fetched some apollinaris from a sideboard, and continued to talk desultorily, revealing his methods of killing time with literalness and humor. He did not care for fame: he had no desire to distinguish himself in athletics, in society, in the larger world beyond the A. B. It was all a matter of ennui. But the fresh air of the mountains, the rough zest of the great plains, the simple joys of the body, — with these he could be content. And he was "not a bad lot," as he himself said. Frank Mason and Roger ran about with the women in their social set, — the good society of New York and Boston, — and a naughty lot of girls and women they were, according to this youth. Their weaknesses and follies had no charms for him; he had seen them grow up. "If I want that kind of thing," he observed, "you know I had rather take it straight. It's no good making the world all nasty."

The narrowness and emptiness of life! The boy unconsciously painted the futility of living. That was the story of the impassive, sad renaissance face, — a mask for ennui. He had inherited what Elsie Mason had set forth in her incisive philosophy of life as the desirable things to strive for, and they had no zest. Yet, as he talked, Jack saw that after all the young generation was close to the one that had tablets raised in its honor in Memorial Hall. Let there come to-night a call, a chance for some definite excitement, be the cause good or bad.

and Ned Mather and his kind would be the first to grasp the sword. The run of men are simple children, and they cannot respond to the abstract needs of life: they need the battle-cry and the flag!

When the morning light came, Mather prepared coffee, and suggested turning in. "Another warning in History 12," he yawned. "I suppose you never get them?" he inquired of Jack with some curiosity.

"I've *got* to get on," Jack answered bluntly. "It's no virtue in me!"

"Ah!" Mather commented politely. "Didn't you use to live near us at Riverside? My sister said something about it."

"Yes. I lived back of your place, — Pancoast Lane."

"Ah!" Mather repeated with an air of polite speculation, as if their respective position was one of the ironies of life. "And you like it here?"

"Not especially," Jack replied. "I, too, don't know just what to do."

"That wouldn't bother me much," Mather responded ironically, "if the good people here would only let me alone."

After that night the two saw each other occasionally. Jack induced Mather to engage the services of Raymond Black as his tutor, with the result that for a time the Dean's invitations became less pressing. Sometimes they went to the theatre, or played tennis together; but as Jack frequented the upper gallery and Mather the floor of the theatre, and as Jack had little time for tennis, these engagements were more or less artificial.

Mather lived half of his time in the city, or at a country club where he kept his horses. He never walked; he dined in a small private club; he rarely followed the college sports. So Jack observed that two citizens of a democracy may cherish the most kindly feelings toward one another, and yet never meet on an equality.

Thus the first year wore away — the year of his great venture, towards which he had looked with so many boyish imaginings. College was not all that he had supposed it to be. It was neither quite all cakes and ale, or beautiful, enticing work which held one in spell. Indeed, thus far, he attended his lectures, and did the required reading in his courses conscientiously, but with little real appetite. He was one of two hundred or more boys in most of his courses, and he was at sea. The only thing to do was to swim on stoutly in the hope some day of feeling ground under his feet. But this indifferent, unemphatic attitude toward his courses was really one of the best things Harvard had to offer. It threw Jack Pemberton and many another young fellow back upon the place itself, upon the subjects themselves; and already before his freshman year was spent he had begun to realize that the intangible spirit of the college was more than lectures or courses, more than information or scholarship. And that spirit was a sense of catholic, high-minded living, a feeling that the world was a fine and noble place to live in, if you lived in it like a gentleman. And this corner of the new world, from which the passion and glory of worldly success had shifted forever to

broader, fresher regions, had this to offer from its store of tradition in culture and learning, that to live finely was the best thing in life, better than honor and fame and success. Not in a day, nor in a year, but slowly, like all truths of the spirit, this immutable conviction was born in Jack Pemberton. Later he knew that that was pretty nearly all Harvard had given him from her treasury.

Meantime, it was a lonely place, God knows! The little world went its busy little way and left one alone, especially if one were a freshman not from a large school, without previously formed relations, with the puritan shame of knocking at the doors of strangers. Many a day Jack Pemberton strode up quiet Brattle Street, out into the fields that were turning green, with a thirst for a human word, — nay, the mere presence of another silent person. And he knew there were countless others among the hard-working students, or the great mass of middle youth, who knew their neighbors well enough to borrow oil or matches, who went to two or three rooms at rare intervals, but at the end of four years passed out of Cambridge, as much alone as they had entered it. If it had not been for Stevenson and little Black, it would have been far worse, but Stevenson — “Big Steve,” as he was usually called — was roaming ceaselessly to this man or that; and little Black, who had won a scholarship at Christmas, was working furiously day and night.

Jack Pemberton was finding his place, slowly but inevitably, in the Harvard world. He was a “B” student, who wrote a boyish hand, and whose labored exam-

ination books lay undistinguished in the blue mass submitted to the overworked instructor. He was trying to get on the *Daily Crimson*, in emulation of Stevenson, and correcting manuscripts for the indiscriminate *Boston Scavenger*, with the tactful earnestness of one whose daily bread depends upon the adequate accomplishment of the daily task. He had not entered a private dwelling since he had left his uncle's little cottage, and had not spoken to a woman. Elsie had written to him as she had promised. She had not forgotten her "cub." But Jack, stung by the crude criticism that his uncle and aunt had made of his liking for this woman, had never replied.

Days came, the warm days in early June, in which the bluff New England country puts forth its most winsome aspect, when Jack heard the thrushes calling from island to island over Green Hill Bay, when he smelled the resinous wine of the far North Shore, and saw the color come and go on a mobile face that seemed the most responsive, most human thing in the round world. And the face of the ambitious girl confused itself with the face of the vision he had seen on Green Hill. Together they called him, and his heart responded with a rush of tenderness, of service, and then he put them both from his mind — as Woman, the thing that disturbs and maddens; the thing that was not for him. But they came again and entered his heart. Such days the old brick buildings, the busy Square, the multitudinous youth, took themselves into the dim, phantasmagoric region that ever beset him. This college world was no more real than the other worlds, only more gentle, more decorous. He

was still sitting before the players' few yards of stage, and hearkening to the strange sounds of mock voices, watching the antic motions of nervous puppets. Ah! for the grip of those warm fingers, the ripple of that laugh . . .

There sounded the incessant clap, clap, tap, rap of the footsteps of the youth on the brick pavement beneath his window. The recitations were out, and the young men were going hither, thither, as if the world were real, were really real!

CHAPTER III

THAT summer Jack took the place of the Boston clerk in his cousin's hotel, and performed his duties so skillfully that his uncle and aunt refrained from criticising harshly the higher education. Elsie Mason spent very few days at the Neck, her summer going in a round of visits. Ned Mather was in bed in the Mather cottage for long weeks, suffering from rheumatic fever, and the incipient friendship Jack had had with him strengthened. Late in the season Black came to the Neck to tutor Mather, who had numberless conditions, and the three young men spent a week together shooting in the backwoods of Maine.

When he returned to Cambridge, the college world broadened for Jack. Here and there he made friends, and finally joined one of the more modest societies. But the big Westerner and the demure student remained his only close companions. Mather had gone back to his polo, and Jack had not seen him for weeks, when one Saturday afternoon he appeared in the little College House room and asked Jack to drive out to Riverside with him and spend the Sunday. His sister had opened the place for a few weeks, he explained, and Jack without hesitation accepted. It would be odd to look at Pan-coast Lane from the other side of the fence! He found

a small house party in the old place on the hill, of whom the Mathers and Frank Mason were the only ones he knew. They were all young people, — Isabelle Mather's set, — and they had a thousand links, formed from common enjoyments and common idleness. Miss Mather, who for her brother's sake made special efforts to interest the new-comer, pleased Jack the least. She had grown tall and thin. Her coloring was pale and fine; her eyes blue; and her hair almost yellow. A little bloodless and delicate, a little thin and narrow, — so Jack thought, — but for all that a distinguished flower from the old Puritan family. Her manners were as well thought out as her gowns, and she never forgot herself for one instant. Jack detected soon that there was something between her and Frank Mason, who was the pet of the set. It made him vaguely uneasy to see the intensity of feeling that flashed into Isabelle Mather's deep eyes for this Mason, whom he considered a common toady.

Sunday evening — it was at the close of a warm April day — Jack came across the two in the old pavilion, which was now a mere wreck for vines to climb over. He had been prowling about old Cliff's garden, which was in the process of being converted into town lots, and had for a half hour gazed over into the weedy back yard of the Pancoast Lane house. It was a dismal place! The cave of misfortune, sure enough! Possibly his family had cursed it, and no successor had had enough sweetness to eradicate their story of depression and defeat. On his way back he had turned to the pavilion, the secret

retreat of his earlier years, where the young aristocrat had given him his first social lesson. Frank Mason and Miss Mather rose at the sound of his steps. He noticed that her pale face was flushed, her eyes exultant; the young man looked consciously satisfied. The intruder halted clumsily and turned to leave them to themselves, but Miss Mather called him, with a cool and indifferent note in her voice:—

“Were you recalling old memories, Mr. Pemberton?”

“Yes,” he replied shortly, turning again to leave them.

“Don’t run away,” Miss Mather continued. “You might point out the scenes of your childhood to Mr. Mason and me.”

Jack thought she was poking fun at him, but in fact she was merely embarrassed.

“I remember pretty distinctly one small, disagreeable scene that took place in this arbor.”

“What was it?” she asked idly, evidently to keep the conversation going. Mason whistled and struck at the dead leaves in the path, gradually drawing away from them.

“Merely a very good lesson administered by you,” Jack replied.

“Oh, I remember!” Miss Mather admitted, blushing with annoyance. Her mood was joyous, however, and she refused to be disturbed. Jack made no effort to find a new topic of conversation. Miss Mather suddenly remarked, as if she had found some common ground:—

“I hoped that Miss Mason would be here. But she

is so very busy in New York. You like Miss Mason a great deal, don't you?"

"Yes," Jack answered simply.

"So do I!" Miss Mather exclaimed, with unaccustomed animation. "She is so unusual — and honest, don't you think so?"

"Yes," Jack admitted, in the same reserved manner.

"Have you seen her lately?" she continued, as though resolved not to lose sight of this topic.

"No, not lately."

The limited replies dampened the girl's cordiality. At a loss what to do with this singular guest, whom her brother had injected into her house party, she led the way toward the house.

"Do you like your college life, Mr. Pemberton?" she asked, making another effort.

"Sometimes," Jack laughed, and then Miss Mather laughed at their futile attempts to converse. She was gay and excited — a mood that Jack attributed to the *tête-à-tête* which he had interrupted.

"Do you see Mr. Mason in Cambridge?" the girl asked shyly.

"Never," Jack replied promptly.

Then she took him to the stables to show him a new pony that Ned had just bought, and from there they went to the conservatory to see an orchid which had been much praised. Her hospitable attempts irritated Jack, and yet he rather liked the girl. While she talked he kept wondering what qualities in Frank Mason had attracted her.

That something had happened which might bring Mason nearer to the Mather family, he could guess from Ned Mather's attitude toward Mason the next morning on their way to Cambridge. He caught Mather's cold, expressionless face studying Mason with nonchalant scrutiny, as if he were searching for the charm that had acted on his reserved sister. Jack fancied that it would not be altogether agreeable to be a *nouveau*, as Elsie expressed it, and a suitor for Miss Mather's hand. After Ned's comparatively harmless scrutiny, there would be Roger's and the General's. But Frank Mason was apparently undisturbed.

Jack was glad to be back in his work-a-day world, with an engagement at the editorial rooms of the *Boston Scavenger*, a thesis in constitutional history to be finished, and a hundred petty obligations which weigh upon the poor and ambitious. Stevenson tramped boisterously into his room at noon, with the announcement that he had been promoted from the second to the first 'varsity boat.

"Who says that everything goes by favor in this town?" he demanded exultantly.

Jack did not agree with the inference altogether, but he rejoiced at the fact. After Stevenson had departed to carry his joy elsewhere, Zimmerman dropped in for a few minutes. This young instructor, who had recently passed through the struggles which beset Jack, had taken a great liking for the younger man, and talked with him openly as a comrade. He it was who gradually turned Jack's thoughts to the law school, that tradi-

tional gate through which so many poor and ambitious American young men have passed out into life. After Zimmerman had gone, Jack settled himself at work, and it was not until far into the evening that the thought of Riverside, Frank Mason, the Mathers, returned to his mind.

Frank Mason might be said to have arrived! He wondered if Elsie had been equally successful. The little he had heard of her lately had not enlightened him. As he thought of her in the idle moments at the close of his busy day, the old longing to be with her, to hear her voice, came over him. Should he ever see her again, intimately? He laughed at himself, and went to bed.

Not many weeks thereafter occurred the first great baseball game of the season between Harvard and Yale on Soldiers' Field. As Jack was leaving at the close of the fifth inning, he heard his name called from a row of seats before which he had to pass.

"Jack!"

He stopped, and looked vaguely at the sea of faces.

"Jack!"

There could be no mistake in the tone, and this time he saw Mason, who was leaning over his sister's shoulder and whispering. But Elsie waved Frank aside impatiently, and stood up. Jack raised his hat, and climbed impetuously up the rough corners of the staging until his head emerged on a level with Mason's. Elsie, who had been watching him eagerly, smiled, and said, mischievously:—

"Couldn't I do that? Give me your hand."

Before Frank could place a detaining hand upon her arm, she had slipped from her seat and was swinging down the trusses. A laugh followed her from the section. Elsie looked up, waved her hand jauntily at her party, and turned to Jack.

"Why haven't you written me? What are you doing with yourself? Are you forgetful or just nasty?"

"I wanted to forget!" Jack exclaimed.

"Pride, eh? Bad thing. Now that stupid game will last another hour. You are going to take me over to the river and talk to me until six. Then you can bring me back to Frank's rooms. Come!"

They skirted the semicircle of lofty staging, which was black with restless people. Elsie glanced at the young man critically. Finally, she delivered her opinion:—

"You're most a man now, Jack, did you know it? And handsome."

"You have changed, too," he replied, blushing.

"Yes," she admitted. "The two years have gone fast. Tell me!" She came closer to him, brushing his arm in her eagerness. "Do you like me just as well as ever?"

He would not reply, and she dashed off upon a new attack.

"Tell me all about yourself. What are you going to do? Have you made your place here? Who are your friends? But first, what profession will you take? I want to know *all*!"

"Law, I guess," Jack responded, with amusement.

"That's good," she commented thoughtfully. "I should say that or journalism. Law opens up into many paths,—politics, diplomacy, higher business. We Americans don't think enough of diplomacy. Yes, I am pleased with law."

Her air of worldly judgment amused Jack, and also the summary method in which she disposed of all alternatives.

"You haven't influence enough for business."

"I thought of teaching," he added. Elsie frowned.

"Teaching, even the professor's work in a university, doesn't count for much in our country. We're too young. In England it is another thing, or Germany, but only timid ones—or queer people you never know—take to that kind of thing in our country. I don't mean to belittle the scholar," she added, with an air of broad worldliness, "any more than the minister, if one is called."

She left it to be inferred that to be "called" to either form of ministration should be regarded as a calamity. Jack smiled at her conception of choosing a career, as if it were a practical affair like selecting a house-lot, over which one should not waste too much time coquetting with the soul, but should dash ahead at once, and never look back.

"Well, now that is settled," she continued, "tell me about your friends, your social life. People, you know, are more important than books. Every solid acquaintance you make now is like a seed planted; you will get results later. You know I don't mean that in the snobby way Frank would take it! I don't mean merely as con-

nections they will be valuable, but as interests. You should know people who will mean something in the world, as you will mean something."

"I haven't much to show," Jack responded half-humorously. "Only little Black, and Big Steve, and Mather, and Zimmerman."

He sketched these friends for her in a few words.

"I like your man Stevenson," Elsie responded quickly. "Frank would not know enough to appreciate him, would see only his 'bounder' side; but power will out, and the power in our country lies with just such men. Black's story is pathetic and all that, but he will be a mouse in a corner. Don't take yourself cheaply. People will make room for you at your own estimate of size. Make that large," she ended sagely.

Her parade of aphoristic wisdom amused and troubled Jack, and yet he was inclined to heed her advice as he had done before. He suspected that she voiced the thoughts of the people with whom she lived.

"Now you?" he suggested.

"Yes," she exclaimed, with a new zest of egotism, "I have seen so much!"

And she plunged in, talking rapidly, helping out her meaning with little gestures, calling upon his sympathy to fill in with detail what she had time merely to hint at. Her circle had widened and shifted. There was an odor of what Elsie called "Bohemianism" to it. Tuttrell's name came in again and again. Jack had seen this name in the popular magazines. He was a spirit that lived in the mixed waters of literature, journalism, and

magazine appearance. To coin a word, he was "magazinist." Elsie seemed to prize him highly, as a kind of intellectual etiquette to the social brew she was making. She also handled familiarly the name of Scanlan, the artist, assuming that the man's fame had reached Jack's world. In an aside she counselled him to see pictures: there was no better road to real culture. Then there were foreigners—artists, attachés, special commissioners. Her ease with foreign languages had been helpful. She advised Jack to master French, at least. Lastly came more familiar names, and among them the Mathers, who seemed of quite secondary importance now. "Frank, you know, is very sweet on Isabelle," she closed.

They had reached the end of the river path, where the dredging machines were at work. The sunset was fading over the green cemetery. Elsie looked at her watch with a business-like sense of time.

"We must get back to Frank's room," she ordered.

Jack found surprisingly little to say to this alert, worldly-wise young woman, whose very sympathy was mere egotism. She had outdistanced him again in these two years. She swept the pretty spring landscape, bounded by the graceful curves of the Brookline hills, but her face betrayed no especial pleasure. She gathered her dainty skirt in her firm hand to protect it from the dew of the marsh grass.

"It's great to be with you, Jack," she remarked, returning as always to the dominant personal note. "Give me your arm! There, I like to feel that you are tall and strong."

They talked little on their way back. When they reached the streets of the town, which were filled with students accompanying ladies, she dropped his arm.

"When are you going to pay me that visit?" she demanded. "This spring?"

"Oh, sometime," he replied evasively.

"But you will write, at least? And this summer?"

"I have some work in Boston. I shan't be at the Neck."

"Then you must come on the first thing next fall, and write me, won't you?"

She threw all the stress of her imperative will into the demand, and forgetting his resolution, he agreed to write, to visit her, not to drift away again.

They met Frank at the entrance to Claverly with Miss Mather and her brother and the chaperone. They all stood chatting for a few minutes. Miss Mather spoke to Jack; her face had the same joyous animation he had felt in her mood at Riverside. She had forgotten herself momentarily, and was happy at nothing. Frank asked Jack to join them at supper, but he refused and took leave of them, Elsie nodding to him lightly as if they should meet on the morrow. Ned Mather overtook him after he had gone a little way, and the two strolled toward the noisy avenue where the crowded electric cars were making a great noise.

"Odd, isn't it?" Mather observed in his tranquil, detached manner.

"What's odd?"

"That such a thoroughbred and such a mongrel should come from the same stock."

The epithets seemed to Jack especially apt; coming from a possible brother-in-law, they had a strange audacity.

Nevertheless, the visit to New York was put off for one reason or another. Elsie wrote at long intervals, and Jack answered at still longer intervals. He was exceedingly busy: by taking extra courses and studying in the summer school while working in Boston, he finished his undergraduate course in three years and entered the law school. He had worked hard, achieving a reputation among the instructors who noticed him of honest intelligence and maturity rather than of cleverness. His silent, inquiring face attracted the attention of a lecturer, who found himself frequently talking to this face rather than to his class. Yet it was impossible to surmount the youthful shyness and reticence of the fellow: the instructors never came to know him.

One May day, at the close of his first year in the law school, the occasion for the visit came about. Steve was ill in New York, his sister Mary wrote him, and his mother thought he should show enough brotherly feeling to see what could be done for Steve. And one of Elsie's rare letters had come that week. It was an unusually fluttered missive, ending:—

"But I can't write it—this thing which I started to tell you. It is very important, and I want to *see* you. Do you care enough after these three years to come?"

Was he boy enough to follow the bait? He knew that he was.

It was a little epoch in his life this journey to New York. With a certain complacency he reviewed the years since the girl's honest, kindly words had first aroused his boy's mind. Then he had framed a plan, and now he could see it partly executed. She had said that the first thing which separated him from other people was education. That in the accepted sense he had got, and he could see his way pretty clearly to his professional training. A small publishing house had offered him work, which he could do while taking his courses in the law school. And in the larger experience of life he had gained something; his Harvard, maybe, was narrow and quiet, but it was nevertheless dear to him. He had accepted his position in the great middle class of nobodies, and had made himself respected enough.

So, as he walked down the flag-stones beneath the trees that were pushing out their young leaves, and enjoyed the May sunshine which had opened the windows and drawn the men out of doors, he had a pleasant content. "Big Steve" joined him on his way home from a class, and they dawdled companionably in the warm air. Stevenson, who had renounced 'varsity athletics in his senior year, smoked his pipe with all the enjoyment given by a long period of enforced fast. They talked of little Black's triumph in getting final highest honors in classics.

"Done in handsome style—just nerve," the big fellow commented appreciatively. "He'll get one of the best scholarships, and then a travelling one, and some day

he'll be a Ph.D. of some German university, and then up there behind a desk is Sever. Would you like it?"

Jack shook his head.

"No more than I, but it's pretty to see a man cut out from the herd, and lay a straight line across the prairie all by his lonesome."

"*You* gave him his boost," Jack demurred.

"That don't count," Stevenson responded wisely, wagging his pipe. "It isn't the boost — there are plenty of them; it's the jump a man's got after he's had the boost. Zimmerman gave you the boost, and he's given it to others; but *you* took it with a spring. What do you say to coming out to Mound City with me this summer?" he ended abruptly.

"And what?" Jack asked.

"Oh! just to look around, and breathe the prairie air a few months. You can have your horse and rig, and if you want to hunt a job, the old man will fix up something on a ranch or in the road. The road's just getting on its feet. They're building an extension nearly as long as the road itself. I'm going to touch the old man for the job of 'general counsel' when I've swallowed enough law. I will look out for you if you say so."

The Iowa and Northern, as the railroad was ambitiously named, was a byword and joke among Big Steve's friends. Stevenson had told Jack the story of its formation and growth, the dramatic story of the elder Stevenson's struggle for the success of the little railroad. Jack, accustomed to Big Steve's hyperbolic imagination, made the proper New England discount upon all the optimistic

suggestions thus thrown out. Yet, standing there in the scented spring air, his first heat in life well run, with broader avenues opening before his energetic will, the inner joy of sturdy friendship at his heart, he began to see the world of shapes take form and substance. Possibly in time it would come to speak to him personally; already he seemed to stand above the vanity and worldliness of Elsie and her associates, and to feel her desires to be petty and mean, not sufficient for the broad purposes of a man.

CHAPTER IV

THE Masons were living in a large, new "double-decker" apartment overlooking the Park. Certain pieces of Italian renaissance furniture, mixed with Louis XV. mirrors, hung against faded brocade, and a number of battered candlesticks and old prints appeared rather odd in the radiator-and-hardwood-floor American apartment. But they spoke of Elsie and her wanderings, as did also the authors' copies of several modern books scattered over the table by her desk. On the one hand she was seeking to make her way among people; on the other she amused herself with artists, and believed she had tastes.

Jack came in at dinner, at which he was the only guest. They were all to go to the opera, a first night of some new singer, and Elsie seemed more absorbed in that than in anything else. After dinner, while he was smoking a cigarette, and Mr. and Mrs. Mason were putting on their wraps, she came and stood before him with a little air of expectant admiration. She had grown thin, and that had seemingly added to her height, and had deepened her eyes. Her complexion, in spite of the season's wear and tear, had the velvety softness of a child's. In her

opera cloak, with her long, dangling white gloves, the touch of smooth skin across the shoulders, and the black line of her dress, she deserved the admiration.

"You like me?"

"Tremendously."

"I was never better." She patted the fur-tipped sleeves of her cloak approvingly.

"Never!"

"I'm not going to talk to-night; you must come to-morrow morning at eleven-thirty, remember, and then we'll be by ourselves, and I'll tell you everything"

Jack laughed.

"A great secret?"

"A *very* great secret, and you must approve. Ah! Jack it's so good to see you; you're one that just fits, everywhere, here,"—she tapped her heart,—“and here,”—she swept her head. “I know something about you. You are sincere and solemn, and much *re-spected*.” She drew the word out mockingly like a child. “Why didn't you make up to that nice Belle Mather, the one Frank's going to marry? She's of the party to-night. But you mustn't marry,” she galloped on. “It would ruin you, now, and you'd take some duffer of a girl who had been sweet to you. And there you'd be,—flat, a thousand a year, babies. No, Jackey, just bleed the world a little first. I won't let you marry.”

She raced on, in a wave of high spirits, which never flagged for an instant. At the theatre they met Cushing, and Miss Mather, and Frank, who had come with another party. Although it was late in the season, the evening

was what Elsie pronounced brilliant. The boxes were filled, and Elsie amused herself with pointing out people of importance to Jack, who sat behind her in their box. As she swept the auditorium with her glass, each discovery elicited an exclamation and comment. This was her world, the one she labored for and despised. The young man at her side looked up and down the boxes with their women, old, young, homely, pretty, overdressed, overjewelled, haggard, plump, vicious, vacuous, or indifferent, and wondered, like a young man, what could make the array so vitally absorbing, what aspiration could be perpetually fed by the sight of this American aristocracy. Cushing, who had grown stouter and grayer and slower in movement these last years, stood at the other side of Elsie and drawled comments. It was a relief when the orchestra compelled partial silence.

A throng of people dashed in and out of the box during the *entr'actes*. Cushing and Frank made their calls, but Jack sat on, dumb and overlooked in his corner, trying to see the world as these people saw it, and getting hopelessly puzzled. Some of the women leaned close to Elsie's ear and whispered something that made her smile, and then pressed her hand meaningly. Finally, Jack roused himself and talked with Isabelle Mather, who was pale and more bloodless than ever, with black circles beneath her eyes. To be engaged, Jack observed, for a woman in the world, was a great strain. Even the natural pleasures of humanity came with social weight and worry.

"Don't be peevish!" Elsie exclaimed the next morn-

ing when Jack arrived on the moment designated. "I hate peevish children, and you were very peevish yesterday evening."

"I'm no good with people," Jack defended himself.

"Lumpy! Make yourself some good. Do you think people are going to look through your glum eyes and sour mouth, and see what a gold mine they're missing in that solid head."

"You are so tired, Elsie!" he retorted impulsively. "You look this morning years older than at the Neck. What is the matter?"

"Jack," she smiled dolefully, "I *am* tired, and years older. We can't talk here. Let's go out to the Park among the nurse maids."

When they had dodged the thundering cars in the street and plunged into the green park, she began:—

"You don't know how good it is to see you. It's like a taste from the salty ocean across Seal Island! Will you be good to me and understand, try to understand—I always want to tell you things, Jack."

She was the pleading child once more, demanding that everything about her should be in tune, throwing herself impulsively on the mercy of his stolid will,—a tired, worn child, who had an unusually long sum in arithmetic before her and had forgotten the rules. He made no response, confident that more was to come, passive as was his habit in words, but with a dumb, masculine tenderness in face and eyes.

"Do you know what's happened?" Elsie broke in again. "Do you know what I *made* you come on for?"

At last Jack looked up from the gravel path which he had been studying, and asked abruptly: "Do you like Bushy — Mr. Cushing, I mean?"

"Jack," — she put her hand on his arm and made him stand still, — "I'm, well I'm going to marry Bushy."

He dropped his arm, as if struck by some unforeseen calamity.

"What's the matter? You take it as if I had just said I was going to take poison. See, listen, and don't be peevish." She led the way to a bench, and, sitting down, turned her face to his; she was serious, eager to convince him, to justify herself. "I admire Mr. Cushing *immensely* — you don't understand him! He is very clever — not your way, but in business, and has made all his fortune, *himself*. He's wanted to marry me for years, and, well, I'm engaged."

Jack laughed vacantly. It was all very absurd.

"He belongs to a good family, too, and *we* don't."

"What's that got to do with it?" Jack asked roughly, laughing at her.

"Everything! I want — my chance."

She emphasized the words lingeringly, and as Jack gave her no clew, nothing to argue about, she continued: —

"I am always on the outside, a rank outsider; you can't see, but I *know* and *feel* it every day. And to have the best people for friends, you've got to have position. Now I can't make a position, can I? I've done pretty well with what I have had to start with. But you can't

pick up the nicest people here and there as you want 'em. Money won't do it. And I haven't even money. A woman must have *position*, Jack; of course you can't understand that, but if you went about — when you know the world — you'll understand."

She used her hands nervously, outlining in the air the vague creations of her mind, which loomed before her as vividly as the distant roofs of the city that he could see in the haze beyond the Park. She was groping for a larger field, a higher altitude, and he listened, trying to grasp her meaning.

"One doesn't want to be second-rate, Jack, does one?" she questioned scornfully, and went on without pause. "I want people about me, millions of 'em, and houses, and horses, and — everything up there." She waved her hand sharply in the direction of the avenue. "And he sympathizes, he understands what a woman needs, and we shall be united, I think."

Jack laughed again senselessly.

"You don't do him justice! His father lost all he had before he died, and Mr. Cushing has *made* his own fortune, built up his business himself, — that's a fine thing, Jack, — and earned the respect of self-made men, as well as old swells like Marchmont and General Mather. Shouldn't I feel proud that a man like that cares to marry me, a nobody from Ohio?"

"I guess so," Jack observed laconically, and then laughed again. "You talk queerly, though, using your wits too much."

"Oh, Jack," she murmured appealingly. "Don't say

that. You know I can feel— Well,”—her voice changed to a new, hard key,—“suppose I *am* heartless and worldly. What of it?”

“But you’re not, all the way through,” Jack remonstrated stoutly.

“I don’t know. I feel as hard as nails some days. I feel I could do anything to get what I wanted.”

“What’s the matter with what you have?”

“To be snubbed by Mrs. Marchmount! You don’t understand, Jack. You think all those people fashionable you saw yesterday at the opera. Well, they’re not; most of them are only halfway. And that’s what I have been all my life, just halfway—a kind of superior hotel girl. Papa and mamma don’t want anything better than good dinners and the theatre, but I,”—her passionate face wore the expression of age that had come about her eyes—“I will go farther, and the first thing to do is to marry!”

“He takes you on those terms, does he?” Jack asked curiously. “Doesn’t he want you to love him?”

“Of course, I love him, Jack—I’d be a fool to marry him if I didn’t! And it would be very wrong, too! I don’t love him sentimentally, and gushingly, like a girl, but honestly, with respect and all that.”

“You don’t seem to love him any too much!”

“Why do you say that?”

“You’re too clear-headed about it, and what you want to get.”

“Nonsense! You’re a mere boy.”

“Think so?” He turned his bloodshot brown eyes on

her hungrily. "You don't know what it is to love, I believe, and perhaps never will."

"What is it to love, then?" she asked, with childish impetuosity, as if eager for the revelation of a new mystery.

"It's to see what you love taken away before your eyes, and keep on loving for the sake of loving," Jack answered, rather darkly. "It's to care for nothing else, to see nothing else, to hope for nothing else."

"Could you love that way?" she demanded, with vivid curiosity.

"Elsie, Elsie," he repeated, lingering on the name that he rarely used even to himself, "I love you that way, and it's so sublimely silly, especially now! But I know what I say is so. I shall always love you —"

He stopped, embarrassed by his courage. The girl's buoyant manner sank to a stillness that was oppressive.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed at length, with an effort. "You're silly, and I never expected *that* of you. We've never been sentimental."

"Don't bother about it," Jack retorted, wincing. "I shouldn't have said anything if it hadn't been so far away and impossible. Put it down to me as a little eccentricity — it won't do you any harm. But that's what love is — the power to care just the same when it's beyond your reach."

"You're not a boy any longer," she said, after a moment, "and I am glad you feel that way. It somehow is so strange!"

She put her hand upon his, as though to bring them

nearer. He took it gently, and touched it softly with his other hand. "Always," he muttered. "Almost! almost!"

"What do you mean, Jack?" she asked, with grave curiosity.

He smiled, his eyes far away upon the misty hills above Green Bay.

"A feeling I have," he explained, "that things are always just beyond, hidden away, beyond my reach. You stepped out from the fog, and now you will step back."

"No, no, no," she iterated appealingly. "Don't! I want you to love me for always."

"A selfish child!"

"Yes," she admitted honestly. "Horribly selfish."

"Well, you will always have it — will *that* please you, Elsie?"

"Yes," she answered, withdrawing her hand as a victoria came toward them from the lower end of the park.

"Of course," she resumed, when the carriage had passed, "I've thought about all that. But I suppose I am not like most girls. I'm practical and outspoken, and — really matter of fact. Perhaps I haven't what people call heart."

"I hope not," the young man commented bluntly. "And that you'll never discover one later. People seem all alike," he mused on. "Groping for something that will be real to them. I wonder if most of them ever find it! I thought you were different — never had to go a-groping in the dark, but you're groping harder than the

rest. I hope you'll find what you want, I'm sure. I think I never shall."

"Of course I'll find it," she rejoined triumphantly, relieved that they were back once more on the safe ground of her puissant ambitions, where her indomitable will and assurance could find ground to play. "I shall be somebody — the world will move."

"Your world will always move," he assented, with a touch of his old admiration.

"And I've thought, too, that I could make yours a little better. Yes, really, I've thought lots about that — what I could do for you when I am established."

He did not thank her, and she continued coaxingly:—

"Bushy — we are going to build a splendid cottage at High Head, the other side of the Neck. He bought the land last summer. And there are to be loads and loads of guest-rooms, and a small harbor, and a breakwater, and stables. And we've selected a lot up here east of the Park."

"Then the fog will lift," he remarked, following a different line of thought.

"Tell me what you mean by the fog!" she demanded.

So he tried to tell her how his life had been — the simple, intangible experiences of his soul, the perpetual isolation, the nothings, until he had known her.

"And *you* were real," he ended, with a laugh. "At least I thought so."

"You think I'm not now. I'm groping?"

"Yes."

"In a selfish way, blindly, marrying Bushy?"

"Yes, marrying Bushy!"

"I suppose so," she acknowledged, "but I don't feel this way often. I see things and I want them."

"I hope you'll get them," he answered, a little wearily.

"Well, we must go home for luncheon now," she rejoined briskly. "You must be nice to Bushy — I'll make him be nice to you."

They walked down the path in silence, but before they came out into the glare of the avenue near the apartment building, she paused a moment and put her hand on his arm.

"Jack, I *don't* love that way!" Her face was very earnest and puzzled. "Perhaps there's something the matter with me! But I am glad you — feel that way. Will you always?"

"Always," he repeated, laughing ironically, "long after you have forgotten this and me."

"I sha'n't forget, Jack! You have given me too much."

He smiled sadly in acknowledgment, and taking her small, firm hand, carried it to his lips. Then he blushed, discomfited, with the Anglo-Saxon self-consciousness in yielding to his impulse.

"Jack, dear Jack!" she murmured, and seemed loath to have the moment pass.

Yet, in spite of the genuine tenderness of her voice, her manner, there was something in the very firmness of flesh, the cool hard tones of the face and hands that gave the man a sensation of essential coldness. Perhaps to every one, — to the next caller, or Bushy himself, — she was equally frank, generous, entertaining, and heartless. There was

nothing false or hypocritical in her, and possibly nothing capable of great tenderness, of great passion and devotion. If so, she might be wise to play with her world as she had. When she left him at the entrance to the Park—for he refused to return to luncheon—and walked away, erect, determined, admirably capable for any event, he felt again those firm, cool hands, and saw the gray, cool eyes. Was it perfect health, perfect sanity,—and nothing more?

He roamed about the Park aimlessly, and after a time he found the bench where they had sat, and stayed there for hours. He listened closely for the tones of the girl's voice, and he still tingled with the glow she had always given him—in spite of the wretched conviction that for the first time she was taking a false step, which would lead her into undreamed-of difficulties and self-deceits. She was so possessed by what immediately surrounded her! Could she not see that in a short time these surroundings would shift, vanish, change, and that the bustle of her mind would change too?

He was not so devoid of humor as not to smile at himself,—twenty-one, as nearly penniless as a man could be, his 'prentice years not finished, and in love with a woman who cared supremely for all the things that he had not! Until she had told him, in her casual, irresponsible manner, that she was to marry, he had never thought what she was to him. He told her that he should always love her,—and he had no sense now of personal loss. For in his imagination she was always moving in spaces withdrawn from his silent world. Her determination to

marry this man, or any other, was but a harsh sign of her physical remoteness from him. That could not take away his love or stale the joy of it. It simply set it firm, as one of the unalterable elements of his life. She would need it, too, he felt secretly,—she would always need love and devotion, more than one man could give, more than this gray, heavy person called Cushing had the power to give. Some day in the more peopled future, he should touch her perchance more nearly.

The feathery verdure of the trees swam mistily in the soft heavens, the roar of the great city enveloped the Park, like a powerful overtone. An energetic sparrow hopped pretentiously to and fro on the gravelled path in front of his bench,—officially displaying its private affairs. From the gay people in the opera boxes to this important sparrow at his feet life hummed past him, each member performing with ridiculous self-absorption and energy his little puppet-show! He drew himself from the bench, and slowly, wearily feeling the pounds of his body and counting his steps, he walked on, determined to plant himself in the thick of things, sooner or later, and start there his puppet-show and lose himself as the others did in enthusiasm over their own antics.

The girl was so fair and appealing! Her white hand trembled in his, her eyes struggled to see beyond the surface brilliance of her little scene, her mouth rippled in eager speech—the pity that she would cast herself into that man's cold arms!

His purposeless steps brought him to the steep heights

far up the city. He looked down hungrily into the city's depth, searching in the indistinguishable blur of roofs for the big apartment building that held her. That was her world, the opulent city! And he was a tramp who had wandered into its streets. Some day he should return to the city and to her.

CHAPTER V

STEVE PEMBERTON lived in a small flat in a new apartment building on one of the thoroughfares of upper Harlem. When Jack called he was admitted, after a long delay, by a young woman who peered around the edge of the door, holding together the folds of a wrapper with one hand. After the first moment of suspicious scrutiny, she threw open the door and smiled rapidly.

"I guess you're Jack," she said, laughing at the young man's astonishment. "Come right in. Steve's gone round the corner to get a shave, and he'll be back directly. We've been looking for you most all day."

Talking and laughing alternately, she hurried Jack into the front room and pushed out a large "rocker" for him. He was too much puzzled to reply to the little questions she emitted. Mary had not written him of Steve's marriage, and he was confident that she would not omit such an important bit of family news. This young woman, on the other hand, with her intimate air of proprietorship in the flat and in Steve could not be a servant, or a nurse. Possibly she was the landlady of the apartment.

She made many apologies for her wrapper, which though far from fresh, became her tall figure, and for her rumpled hair, which she poked nervously without obtaining any perceptible order in its fluffy mass. Her

volubility declined under Jack's diffidence. She sat down on the edge of the lounge opposite him and crossed her legs, stretching out two plump, rather large hands over her knees in order to display her rings. She was pretty in spite of her large hands, high cheek bones, and a defective tooth. Her hair of a peculiar light gold was brushed up in fluffy waves according to the new Paris mode, which Jack had seen the evening before for the first time. There were evident remains of powder over her plump face, and deep circles under the blue eyes, which added to their prettiness. A slight puffiness of flesh, both of face and of arms, indicated a lack of exercise.

"How do you like the city? Ever been here before?" she repeated more slowly, endeavoring to cover the bare arms in her wrapper.

Jack's stumbling answer was interrupted by the arrival of Steve, who carried a bulky paper parcel. The two brothers shook hands and looked each other over with mutual curiosity, as if inquiring what changes four years had wrought. Steve had grown noticeably stouter, and his blond mustache had thickened. Jack's memories of his older brother had softened during their separation; he was not prepared for this rather loudly dressed, handsome but sensual young clerk. The years at Cambridge had accustomed him to a different type.

"You're looking better than I expected to find you," Jack said first. "Mary wrote you were sick."

"Stella has nursed me fine," Steve replied, jerking his head in the direction of the young woman. "Have you

introduced yourself?" he added. And in spite of Stella's giggling response, "I guess we made out to pass the time of day," Steve pronounced the proper formula: "Make you acquainted with Miss Seymour, my brother John." Stella and Jack shook hands, and Stella said briskly, "Be pleased to know you better, Mr. Pember-ton."

After a moment's embarrassed silence, she remarked:—

"Yes, your brother's been real bad. He'd be all right, if he behaved half decent, wouldn't you, Steve?"

Then perceiving the bundle, she seized upon it with hilarity.

"Got anything good there? I hope you brought along some *crème de menthe*. I don't like your horrid whiskey."

She jumped up from the lounge and whisked across the room to a tiny secretary, which contained various bottles, and noisily rattled them about. Then she whisked into the inner room to wash some glasses, her stride bringing out the rustle of a silk skirt beneath the wrapper.

"Stella's been real nice," Steve observed, when she was out of the room, as if to break up Jack's shyness.

"What's that he's saying 'bout me?" Stella called from the inner room. "I wouldn't trust your brother 'round the door, he's so smooth with the ladies."

She burst into a trill of laughter and opened her eyes full upon Jack as she reappeared, holding the glasses at arm's length by their stems. Her pose reminded Jack of one of the soubrettes Stevenson and he had admired from the gallery of the theatre. Only all her acts, in this

tiny apartment, were emphasized and coarsened, as is a photograph when drawn rapidly toward the eyes.

"Have a drink?" she asked cheerily, flourishing a bottle over her shoulder. "I don't like to see ladies drinkin' whiskey, do you?" she added, peering confidently into Jack's face and opening her lips in a rapid smile. "It looks *tough*, I say; most of the girls do, though."

Tongue-tied Jack felt like a fool.

"A little cordial, or wine, or a nice tintsy, wintsy cocktail now?" She raised the glass in a theatrical sweep, and with a "To our better acquaintance," drank it off.

Then she offered Jack a cigarette and lit one. Throwing herself into a lounging chair, she inhaled a long puff of smoke, letting it filter through her nostrils, closing her eyes in dream. In a moment she was up again, whisking in and out, walking with the soubrette swagger and sweep. Jack could not talk. Even when she was out of the room, he could not bring his eyes to rest easily on his brother. The girl made an uncomfortable consciousness between them of something not to be mentioned.

A slatternly servant came in from somewhere at this point, and with Stella's assistance prepared dinner. When Stella was removed, the embarrassment between the brothers increased rather than lessened. The woman rose between them as something that could not be discussed. In an effort to regain his assurance, Steve began to talk about the family. Had Jack been to Coffin's Falls to see them? On Jack's shaking his head, the

older brother had his chance to deliver a little lecture on family feeling, which put him in a comfortable position of superiority once more:—

“Mother’s poorly,” he ended. “And when she’s gone, you’ll know what you missed and what you haven’t done. Mary’s grown to be quite a girl.”

Then he talked about his business—he was salesman in an iron foundry business—and asked Jack about Harvard, commenting:—

“I’ve never seen anything but fooling among college boys. All they go there for, I guess, is to have a good time, easy, for four years.”

He shared the universal belief of his class in the inutility of the higher education.

So it was a relief to sit down to dinner with Miss Seymour, who had exchanged the wrapper for a bright lavender silk skirt and white waist which made her seem larger and more buoyant than ever. She was good-natured and full of lively spirits. Jack forgot his embarrassment, and enjoyed her little worldly airs, her vivacity and slang.

“You’re going to take me to the show,” she announced at dessert. “Old Lou gave me tickets when I went to strike him for a job yesterday. Mamie Holabird is in it.”

Steve made no objections, and after Stella had cautioned her invalid jocularly not to make a night of it with some other lady, the two took the elevated train for the city. In the car, which was well filled with men and women on their way to the theatres, Stella attracted attention less

by her dress than by her manner and her abundant laugh. Jack was uncomfortably conscious that he and his companion were of vivid interest to fifteen or twenty dull persons.

At first Stella's habit of looking very intently into his face, coyly closing her eyes only to open them full upon him, disturbed him, but when he realized that this was but a trick, probably caught at the theatre, and did not mean flirtation, he did not mind it. Indeed, beneath the superficial surface of dress and manner, Stella was a city relative of Sadie or Ruth of Pemberton Neck. She had her own standards of propriety and decency, and rather obtrusively paraded these and her honest thoughts. She seemed to comprehend Jack far better than did his brother, and tried to suppress what might appear to him irregular and give him the belief that she was not quite nice,—"like a lady," as she would say. She would have considered it quite abominable to flirt with him or treat him as a gallant.

The play was a popular society comedy, something vulgarized from the French by a coarse English adapter. Stella had a keen eye for the gowns and the decorative elements of the scene.

"Are you on the stage?" Jack asked after the curtain went down.

"I'm not regularly connected," Stella answered. "Last season I was on the road, but the manager went broke."

"Do you like it?"

"They don't pay nothin', and when a girl wants her fling they fire her."

Later she told him that she was expecting to get a place with this company, that she was negotiating with the manager. At the close of the next act she asked about Harvard, and about the Maine country.

"I'd like to get into the country some summer," she added. "A feller—a friend of mine—was going to take some of us girls down to a cottage on the shore, but I guess he went broke. I spent a week two summers ago up on a farm in Vermont. They were real nice folks, and, my! it was a rest."

They had established a good human understanding, and the girl, who had all the narrow egotism, the childishness, of her class, told him about her career. She had been born in a little stuffy side street of Brooklyn, and almost from the cradle her joys had been candy, "fellers," and the theatre. After she left school at fourteen, she had tried working in a store. There she had her love affair, which she talked about with great freedom, as of some rather distinguishing experience, like religion or great worldly success. It had an unfortunate termination. And then had come the old cravings for pleasure, for candy and "fellers" and clothes and champagne and the theatre.

"My folks are real good," she ended, rather boastfully. "And they think I'm working at a big salary. I go to see 'em every now and then, when I've got any pennies, and take 'em something. My sister is married to a fine gentleman out in Buffalo."

The pitiful effort to impress him touched the young man. If it were not for her connection with Steve, he could have been honestly friendly with her. But all the

instincts of his life made it impossible easily to overlook that irregular relation.

"You ain't a bit like Steve," Stella observed at last.

"Why not?" Jack inquired, with curiosity.

"Oh! your brother is a bad boy," she laughed back.

"You're nice and pleasant and friendly. I hate those loud ways all the time."

Her face clouded in the pathetic desire for repose of the tired creature.

As they emerged from the theatre, Stella discovered a friend in the crowded foyer, a tall girl with a sweeping "picture" hat that became her well.

"Isn't this just luck! There's Liddy, and we'll go out to Biron's over on Broadway and have a bite."

The introductions were made, rather loudly; Jack noticed that some of the people who were waiting for their carriages turned and looked at them. His companions were richly dressed, not unlike the innumerable photographs of actresses that were set about the foyer on little easels. Stella and Liddy were of the theatre, there could be no doubt of that, even if they were at the bottom of the "profession."

As they left the theatre, Stella brushed close to one of the women who was waiting for a carriage. Jack recognized Miss Mather and prepared to bow, but she turned her face blankly in another direction, leaving him with the unpleasant sensation of having been observed and not seen.

In the basement café, glittering with the reflection of electric lights upon marble, there were many little theatre

parties. Jack's companions stood in the middle of the room, debating loudly what table to select. They flung themselves into their chairs with dramatic abandon, and unbuttoned their light coats, negligently looking over the assembled company. At the other tables there were some women like Stella and Liddy, and more that gazed offishly and curiously at them.

"Have you any change, Liddy?" Stella asked playfully. Liddy displayed a little gold-mesh purse, from which she drew ten cents.

"That for car-fare to-morrow."

The girls giggled and made much of the topic. Finally they ordered their supper, an expensive one Jack thought when he came to pay the bill, but he little knew what Stella's kindness had saved him from. For Liddy displayed the insatiable greed of the courtesan who sees her chance. Jack noticed that Stella touched her companion with her foot beneath the table, signalling her in some way. The order given, Liddy turned her languishing eyes upon Jack. They had the same deep circles that he had first noticed in Stella. Her manner was more composed; she was evidently more experienced than Stella.

"Do you know Frank Mason?" she asked Jack, when she had learned from Stella that he was at college. "He's a great friend of mine — Mr. Mason."

Jack started at the sound of the name. He did not care to press the subject, however. The recklessness of the girls rose with the wine they drank. They lopped more carelessly over the table, and Liddy dropped her

arm caressingly on Jack's arm. They smoked, one cigarette after another. The other women — those that had stayed on — were also smoking, and over in a corner a rather boisterous struggle was in progress between a man in evening dress and a stout young Jewess.

At twelve they were on the deserted street, walking in the direction of Liddy's room, which was near by. Stella spoke of spending the night there. Liddy was hanging on Jack's arm, her plumed hat brushing against his face. She was talking more rapidly now, and in a pleasant, rather southern voice. When they stopped before a dark house in the cross-street, and he let Liddy's arm fall, Stella exclaimed:

"You ain't goin'. Come in and have somethin' on Liddy. Then you can take me up Harlem way to Steve's."

Jack, who was disposed to accept the suggestion unsuspiciously, disliked the plain reference to her relation with Steve.

"Come in," Liddy urged. "Stella can have Mame's room, I know — it's too late to go way up town. I don't see why Mr. Pemberton lives off there at land's end!"

Then Jack started to mount the long brown steps, not knowing how to refuse, and on the whole quite willing to carry out the adventure of the day. Liddy took his arm.

"Course you're coming right in!" Liddy urged, winking at Stella.

Down the street, several doors away, a cab had driven up, and from it emerged the man they had seen with the

Jewess in the restaurant, and after him the woman herself. His silk hat was tipped forward on his head, and he looked stupidly at the cabman, then at the woman. His companion seized his arm and thrust her hand into his watch pocket, taking thence some bills, one of which she handed to the driver. The man laughed foolishly; the couple turned to mount the steps.

A sudden wave of contempt, of instinctive repugnance at the aspects of debauch, surged over Jack, who had caught the scene at a glance.

"Good night," he exclaimed abruptly, and slid his arm from Liddy's grasp. As he walked up the street toward Broadway, he could easily hear the exclamations, and then the laughter, of the two girls.

"He's too green anyway," was the last intelligible remark that reached his ears, followed by a high-pitched laugh.

He had gone but a few steps before he blamed himself for his rough manner, and concluded that he ought to have stayed and conducted Stella back to Harlem. But the girls had entered the house, and in the uniform row of brown steps he could not make out which house was Liddy's lodging-place. So he continued his walk in the soft April night, with a refreshing sense of relief from the clatter of the two girls.

There was no very definite feeling of virtue in his breast. Though he had seen enough vice in the New England places where he had lived,—vice of a dull, animal kind that reeks in New England towns in spite of conventional restraints,—he had never touched the

world at that spot. He did not have enough experience to be priggish. As he thought of Stella, with her airs, her gayety, her childish narrowness of the pavement-bred, he liked her, and had it not been for Steve he should have liked to see her again. That relation with Steve filled him with a quick sense of shame. He did not know how to behave with her. She was not Steve's wife; she was not his own sister; she was not a girl to be played with. And in Stella's nervous movements about the Harlem flat there had been a certain extra bravado, an air of saying, — "I've no business here, I suppose you're thinking. But I don't care what you think, you prude!"

It was the pitiful air of self-defence of the woman used as an animal. It sickened him, and he had a vivid sense of shame before the woman, as if he were observing intimacies that he had no right to observe. Steve was a fool and a brute.

As he walked up the deserted avenue, glad to walk in the silent city, careless where he should sleep, he remembered Aunt Julia's tale of the Pemberton excesses, the village debaucheries of many of his people. So this was what it meant. The eternal itch for pleasure, for relief from the burden of dull living, stung each generation. The thought made him heavy-hearted. Late diners were coming out of the fashionable restaurants on the avenue, and entering the waiting carriages. This part of the city was the great field where seethed, night after night, the passion for pleasure.

Did Steve give way to the common craving in a desire

to find something real, some experience that would bite the consciousness either painfully or pleasantly? Was Steve tormented by the same longing he had had to find the real, to escape the indifferent shades of mere appearance?

He wandered far into the morning hours, — his pulses beating hard against the moist skin of his neck and hands, his brain tumultuous with longings and wonder. He himself had not been far from Liddy's facile door! Pleasure, self-abandonment, the debauch, — poor human souls flung themselves upon that empty void, the ghostly simulacrum of this our life, granted by God in pitiful measure, — flung themselves in inarticulate longing for the world of reality, of which their dreams were but the shadows on the curtain.

"Steve's just stepped out. Come in and make yourself easy."

Jack came in to wait for Steve. He reproached himself for not having seen more of his brother, while he was in New York. Stella was lolling by the window in a rather dirty kimono and broken red slippers. Steve's establishment was distinctly in undress this evening, as if the occupants were recovering from some excessive excitement. There was an odor of scent in the room battling with the fumes of stale cocktails and tobacco. Stella seemed heavy and lethargic. She tightened the folds of her kimono and put her hands to her hair in an endeavor to tidy the mass.

"You ran away the other evening," she remarked in

petulant tones. "Didn't you like Liddy? Most gentlemen think she's quite a peach. And she was awful cut up by your acting that way. Don't you like girls?"

"Yes," Jack answered slowly. "I guess I like girls."

"Well, Steve thought it was a fine joke — he'll tease you right well when he comes in. My, how hot it is! And only May. My head aches awful bad, back here," — she pointed to the exact spot. "Steve's gone to get something to help it. We've been out to the races all day."

She wandered on, not caring for more response than an interjection now and then. She poured out a cordial and handed a glass to Jack; then she lit a cigarette, and threw her head far back. The cordial and the tobacco seemed to soothe her nerves for a few moments, and carry her away in a dream.

"I guess," she mused, "you don't like girls like me and Liddy. You think we're real wicked, don't you? But there's lots worse than us, and those that hold their heads high and mighty, too."

"I don't think you are wicked," Jack replied stupidly, "and I like you."

"You're sorry for me?" she asked quickly, looking at him.

"No, not exactly," he said honestly.

"Well," she threw herself back in the chair again with a sigh, "I like you — you're nice and refined, more'n Steve. But you wouldn't have nothing to do with *me*!"

Her face expressed the doubt and wistfulness of the flabby creature who touches a harder fibre than hers.

"Let's not talk about it!" Jack exclaimed.

"Why not? I want to talk about it — what's the diff, anyway? I'm not going to turn cry-baby now, you can bet. When I was in trouble two years ago, I swore I'd go straight, keep out of trouble; but you know — I guess I don't want to be much different, anyway."

She went to the piano and began to play vehemently a waltz of the Broadway pavement, until the perspiration started from her temples.

"My! my head aches. Why don't Steve come!" She wheeled around once more to face Jack. "Do you feel sweet on that girl — the one in the park you were with? I saw you the other morning."

Jack frowned, but in an instant his first impulse of reticence seemed to him absurd, conventional.

"Yes, but she is to marry another man."

"Oh, well, a feller of your years don't want to be tied up with a wife and children. You'd better come to New York and see something of life — that's what Steve wants you to do."

The young man smiled at the irony of the idea. He had lived a year or two in the few days that he had been in New York, and he did not believe that Stella or Liddy would give him more experience of life than he had already won by following the ordinary path. Already the habits of these people bored him. The cheap scent, the odor of liquor and cigarettes, the theatre, the flabby voluptuous woman's flesh, — it was a vulgar little round, less interesting than the shining prizes that Elsie panted for. One and all they thirsted for thrills that were always

denied in full measure — something told him that always would be denied, let the human nerves throb as they might.

“I may come to New York some day,” he admitted. “Play me something.”

She played a sentimental song about a woman and her child, and sang the refrain in the vaudeville twang. Her face responded to the empty sentiment of the song.

“Say,” she broke in, looking up at him with the dumb appeal of the burdened animal, “do you think the folks that are good — I mean really *good*, no seeming — are happy, — any happier than we are?”

“I don’t know,” he answered sadly. “I suppose so — they wouldn’t struggle so —”

“If I had married a feller, good to me, like you could be! I like babies, — most girls don’t, but I like babies!” And she repeated the phrase until it sounded shrill and foolish: “I like babies, — yes, I like babies.”

Then Steve came in, boisterous, with the swagger and assurance of recovered health, and inclined to tease his brother. But Stella, whose sentimental mood remained, put a period to Steve’s attacks; and they sat about the stuffy flat, at a loss for topics of common interest for conversation, exchanging desultory remarks about the races, the weather, and the properties of mixed drink. Finally it came time for Jack to leave, in order to take the train for Boston. While Steve hunted for his hat, Stella and Jack had a few words together.

“I hope I shall see you the next time I come,” Jack said quite honestly.

"As like as not you'll *not*," Stella replied glumly, "unless you come mighty quick." Then, to explain, she added, "Steve ain't the man to care long for anything, not even a dog."

"I'm glad I *did* see you," Jack said awkwardly.

"Are you? So'm I—real glad," and they shook hands with smiles.

Yet he thought that it would be a relief to her to have him gone, to be able to sink back in the crease of habit without useless longings and unaccustomed ideas. As for himself, he was genuinely attracted by her, feeling beneath her boisterous vulgarity the simple humanity so often missed in more complex souls.

On the street Steve asked abruptly:—

"What are you going to do when you're done with college?"

"Law."

"When you're fifty, maybe you can buy yourself a cigar on Sundays,—unless you're sharper than you look," the older brother remarked sententiously. "I know a dozen lawyers who can't skin twenty dollars a week."

"You say mother is poorly," Jack remarked to lead the conversation back to common grounds.

"She and Mary don't like Coffin's Falls. I guess Uncle Talbot is tired of having them around. He wrote me a long preachy letter about giving them a home. They don't know up in Coffin's Falls what it costs to live—on a salary. I was making money before last January, but I went and blew it in wrong on the market,

and some that wasn't mine, and the end was I had to take this job with Bradshaw & Cushing. And there are no extras there!"

"Perhaps we could manage it, together," Jack suggested doubtfully.

"Oh! later," Steve assented vaguely.

The occupants of the close little flats in the neighborhood were thronging the street through which they were passing to the Harlem station. Many of the women, Jack judged, were like Stella, tenants at will in some irregular establishment. They had an American stylishness, a certain gloss that made them out finer than they were. Oppressed by the unseasonable heat, they were sauntering to and fro in couples, throwing curious licensed glances about at the other promenaders, especially at the two men who passed in solitary distinction.

"Why don't you marry, Steve?" Jack asked after a period of silence.

"What do I want of a woman tied with a halter to my neck!" Steve retorted irritably, and added a popular economic apothegm.

"I mean marry Stella," his brother continued.

"What!" Steve ejaculated, stopping short in his amazement. "You're more of a jackass than I thought you were."

"She's a pretty good girl," Jack continued imperturbably. "I think she would like to be married, and — and live differently."

"I rather guess she would!" Steve chuckled. "What do you take me for?"

"It seems hard," Jack explained, with infinite trouble in expressing himself before this scorn. "They — she and Liddy, have the look of whipped dogs, really — and she would be happy — more than you or I know — if she were married to a man who would be a bit kind to her — poor girl!"

"Is that what you learn at Harvard?" Steve demanded ironically.

"No," Jack replied simply, with the conviction that he was a fool. "It just occurred to me, seeing her there with you."

"It's time you saw something of the world," Steve commented patronizingly. "You're too green."

They shook hands at the foot of the stairs that led to the station. From the elevated platform Jack watched the streaming lines of men and women, moving restlessly up and down the streets for the sake of air and excitement. The great city lay undulating like the sheen of a rich garment, with the spangles of its enormous buildings, flowing over valley and height, outlined by the piercing dots of light from the arc-lamps. Men and women, — seekers for pleasure, toilers for pleasure, — a multitude of hearts longing for the visions that denied themselves . . .

And in the strange, tidal motion of man's soul, there flooded into his crowded thoughts this one vague conception, — that to possess the ultimate vision of things he must forego the alleviations to pain proffered by his clamorous senses. Steve and Stella and Liddy — Mather and Elsie and Bushy — and the countless other thousands of

their kind — played with the phantoms of a world, and called it real. In one embrace or another they spent their bodies and souls, and with each pang of the striving nerves they lost the power to possess. And the temptation his uncle and aunt had feared for him, the brutal thirst of sex, seemed far away and impossible.

The rage that might spend itself thus in drops, dammed and pent within, would some day create the other world! Beneath his sleepless head that night, the car-wheels beat the burden of this new song: "Live and love, and desire and deny, for in the end ye shall conquer and know peace."

CHAPTER VI

THE steamer poked its way cautiously up the tortuous channel to the new wharf near the hotel. Jack stood with Stevenson on the upper deck, beneath the pilot-house, and in the rifts of the fog pointed out to his companion the landmarks of Pemberton Neck. The new cottages, which thrust their unfamiliar roofs through the dark firs, were much larger than the old, weather-stained ones.

"Grow'd consider'ble," the old pilot remarked, leaning sociably out of his window. "There's the latest addition — that palace there atop of High Head, round Maxwell Point. They say the road up there over the Point cost more'n fifty thousand dollars, and the stables — them's the roofs you see — be as good as a hotel. That Cushing — you remember him, the feller that owned the *Eyrie* — built it, begun two years ago in September. They say he's worth a number of millions — made it in steel."

"So that's the Cushing place!" Jack exclaimed, following the irregular outline of roofs with an interested eye.

"Yes, sir," the pilot resumed. "And there ain't a more costly house on the shore. Pemberton Neck's looking up — Bar Harbor'll have to hustle to keep in the procession soon! And it weren't much of a place before Cushing began his house. There are them up here who don't look kindly on rich fellers coming in with their horses and ker-

ridges, raisin' the prices of their dod-blasted old stone quarries. Your Uncle John's one of them kind! But I guess your cousin feels different — he made a fortune."

According to the pilot's account, the majority of the natives regarded Edward Price Cushing as a philanthropist, who had turned a part of the golden stream which had been fertilizing Mt. Desert, Newport, and other well-known spots to their deserving village. No matter what his associates might have to say about the unscrupulousness of the steel and iron manufacturer, no matter how frequent or how bitter were the strikes in his Ohio mills, the progressive residents of Pemberton Neck honored the owner of High Head. The reactionaries, such as Uncle John, had only feeble and vague arguments with which to combat the potent testimony of dollars scattered loosely over the country.

"Your Uncle John," explained the pilot, "undertakes to tell how folks would be better off without sellin' their land, just scratchin' round on it as their fathers did. *He* says it costs more to live, and it don't make no difference how much you pour into the barrel so long as you draw out jest as much. But your Uncle John ain't sold his farm yet!"

"Seems to be the same old row between the two schools of political economy," Stevenson observed.

"And you take sides according to the same old law," his companion added.

The boat backed into the dock, which was crowded with smart traps with men in livery.

The hotel, whither Jack conducted Stevenson, was

scarcely recognizable; it had taken to itself various gawky children in the shape of wings, and it was surrounded by a further offspring of cottages. Yet the broad verandas, where, as Jack remembered, the young men and women tramped and flirted while the mammas sat in innumerable wicker chairs, seemed deserted and forlorn. Pemberton Neck had advanced beyond the rank of a hotel resort.

In the evening, when Jack walked over to his uncle's farm, the road among the black firs was brilliant with electric lights. There were cement walks and hydrants, pipes and drains, and macadamized road-beds. From the main road there branched a multitude of unfamiliar avenues leading to the new cottages. Victorias rolled past him, their harnesses jangling, two men on the box. Fashion was exploiting Pemberton Neck with its usual vivacity.

Beyond the Neck there were fewer changes, although some of the late comers had been squeezed out of the Point up the Cove. The little white cottage, with its border of open fields, was as he knew it. Uncle John was dozing, his slippers off beside the base-burner, and Aunt Julia was reading the *Bangor Times*. They seemed scarcely more immovable than six years before.

"John said you'd come by train same as most of the summer folks, but I thought you'd take the boat. How be you, Jock?" his aunt asked placidly, as if he had been away a week.

"Seed the improvements?" his uncle asked. "Your cousin's sold his hotel."

"And the feller that took it has mortgaged it. Hotels don't pay!" his aunt added.

Jack smiled. This was their acknowledgment that they had been wrong in urging him to stick to Cousin Hadley's hotel.

"So you're a full-fledged lawyer?" Uncle John asked, turning his wizened head with its wagging beard nearer the light.

They did not ask him effusively about his plans. They were waiting. His good clothes, his general air of prosperity, evidently pleased them. Secretly they were proud enough, and Jack knew it. Nothing is so glorious to the New England farmer as the legal profession. Promptly at nine the old man gathered up his slippers and hobbled to bed. Aunt Julia stayed to talk.

"There be lots of new cottages, Jock," she remarked, after a period of silence. "The roads are most too full of hosses and kerridges in summer, but I like to see 'em go by the house. Land's higher'n ever. We got an offer last winter, and I wanted to take it and move over to Rockland, but your uncle is sot on stayin' on the farm. Would you be thinking of coming here to settle, some time? There's a lawyer at the Cove now, and he ain't much of a lawyer, I guess, but he makes a good living."

Jack shook his head.

"I am going to New York in September."

The old lady sighed, but looked at him with an approving smile.

"What put you up to that?"

"I have meant to for a long time," Jack answered simply. "And now I've got an opening in a good office. It will be hard work to live and send mother something, and I could get more out West with Stevenson. He wants me to go in with him in Mound City—form a partnership. But I have always thought of going to New York ever since I thought much about those matters."

"Sot as you allus was," his aunt remarked, not ungraciously. "Seems to me I should go West."

"New York is the biggest pool," Jack observed, with an air of finality.

Then Aunt Julia started a new topic.

"You remember, of course, that Mason girl?"

Jack nodded, suddenly eager for news about Elsie even from Aunt Julia.

"They've built that great place over yonder."

"So the pilot told me. It's huge!"

"She's a real nice girl, Jock. I ain't surprised you were sweet on her. I see her now once in a while. She comes to call. My! Ain't she a talker,—chatter, chatter, and amusin' as the day is long! She allus asks for *you*, what we've heard from you, though I guess she knows 'bout as much as we do. She was up here yestiddy, after some sweet peas for a party, and I told her we were expectin' of you some time this month."

Aunt Julia paused there, and Jack was forced to ask:—

"And what did she say?"

"She grew kind of dumb, and then she said she s'posed you'd let her know when you got here."

As Jack made no observation, Aunt Julia added in her meditative drawl:—

“I doan’t make as much as some o’ the man she married, with all his money. A taller-complected feller with a sour temper, *I* take him to be, and I guess she has to pay high ’nugh for her house and kerridges.”

“Probably.”

“Well, she’s gay and light-hearted as they make ’em. She keeps the place full of folks, a lot of men dangling about, and she’s free and easy with ’em all, same as she used to be. I guess she’ll allus be cheerful, no matter what comes, and that’s the best way a woman can take a husband, be he good or bad.”

As they started for bed, Aunt Julia asked with a little note of trepidation in her voice:—

“There ain’t been any gurls, Jock?”

He smiled and shook his head.

“I shouldn’t wonder, Jock, that you’d be the one Pemberton to get safe over the divide. They’re clever enough, all your family, but they’re dreadful weak.”

Jack smiled more sadly.

“I don’t think it’ll take me that way!”

Neither the next day nor the next thereafter did Jack call at the Cushings’ or let Elsie know of his arrival. Instead, he sailed Stevenson about the bay, or loitered around the little cottage, discussing with Uncle John the strike in the Green Hill quarries. He avoided the dusty electric-lighted roads, but one evening, as he was returning from the hotel where he had left Stevenson, Mrs. Cushing passed him in a light buckboard. He had

almost said, "Elsie," she passed so close to him, talking with the groom, but he repressed the name and looked at her, hurriedly seizing all that he could from the moment. She had grown enough stouter to give her a woman's presence. Her features were fuller, but she retained her rare girlish coloring. Her heavily embroidered gray gown and her erect position lent her an air of stiffness, of propriety, that was new. She talked to the groom in the voice of the competent mistress. Elsie was now a woman!

Many a time they had driven down this road in the autumn twilight, and she had chattered of the future. He wondered if she were now content with what she had accomplished. The next afternoon, when the shadows began to lie broad and cool over the upper harbor road, he walked to Maxwell Point. The county road had been altered to suit the transformation of High Head. As he entered the winding drive which had aroused the pilot's admiration, he remembered that somewhere near by he had been cutting balsam boughs when Elsie Mason had pulled up her horse and joined him. At one of the turns in the road, he sat down to watch the harbor—quiet at this mid-afternoon hour. The balsam scent was pungent about him, and a large blackberry vine ran riotously over the ledge that had been blasted for the drive. The hardy growth of the coast was doing its best to cover up the scars made by the strangers.

A rattling cart came down the drive from the cottage above. The spokes and the felloes sang a discordant tune to the accompaniment of hoof-beats. A thin

woman, one of the "natives," was driving the old white horse, and holding a child in her lap. Another child was asleep in an empty berry crate. As the white horse deliberately halted at the turn in the road, Jack rose, and recognizing the woman, bowed.

"It ain't you, Mr. Pemberton!" the woman exclaimed, a streak of color staining her white cheeks.

"Yes, no one else, Ruth," Jack answered, holding out his hand.

Ruth pulled up the hard-bitted old horse and put out a long, thin hand from her shawl. Jack felt the bones as he took the hand in his, — such a feeble hand!

"How are you?" he asked.

"Not so good, this summer," she answered querulously. "You've grown — you're goin' to be a big man, Jack."

She blushed at the hardihood of her remark. And with the color a trace of the old sweet-pea bloom returned, effacing the brutal ravages of her laborious life.

"You're married, my aunt tells me," Jack said, to make conversation.

"Yes," Ruth answered, the flush coming back. "Been married most three years. Them's the children."

Her eyes looked down vacantly at the babies, who stared at the stranger.

"It ain't been easy," she volunteered. "If 'tweren't for the berries and the chickens, I dunno how we'd get along. I been up to the Cushings' with berries and eggs. They take all I have."

Jack patted the head of the child in the crate.

"How've you been?" Ruth asked more boldly. "I heard you were a scholar — goin' to preach?"

"No," Jack laughed, "I guess not."

And as he found nothing more to say, he asked her where she lived.

"Out on the Bluefields Road. I'd be real pleased to see you; my husband, too."

Jack shook hands and turned to go. The woman's wan face, the aspect of the last effort in her struggle, was intolerable. Ruth spoke to the horse, who with due deliberation started, and the spokes rattled once more with increasing fury as the old cart gathered speed. Jack strode on up the drive, Ruth's haggard face in his eyes. The poor girl had married, craving the solace of her kind, and her pitiful rushlight of life was snuffing out. She would leave these two babies, to repeat her slight bloom, her longings. . . .

The Cushings' stable was placed among the fir trees on the hillside below the house. He saw a groom walking two saddle horses up and down before the stable. Otherwise the house and the stable were deserted. The broad veranda displayed the dainty disorder of occupancy; a novel had fallen open beside a chair, as if thoughtlessly dropped from ennui. It was a long time before there was any answer to his ring. The house seemed asleep at this early hour. Finally a maid scurried across the hall, and in response to his demand for Mrs. Cushing, pointed to a room leading from the hall, and disappeared, as if unaccustomed to this kind of service.

Jack entered the spacious drawing-room, through whose long windows the shore breeze was drawing lazily. It was deserted like the rest of the mansion, and he walked slowly down its great length. Elsie had found here her "room to turn around in." The large house, the spacious elegance of the whole place, reflected her ambition. Jack flung himself down before an open window and mused in the solitude of the great room. She must have changed — three years with Cushing, three years with all the power of his money; it would be impossible for her to keep that soft impressionability of childhood, that dance of emotion which he loved. She would have beaten him again in the race of experience. After a time he grew restless; the long, silent room oppressed him. He walked about, looking at the books, touching the bric-a-brac on the tables, his footsteps muffled in the heavy rugs. At the end of the drawing-room a passageway, concealed by a half-drawn portière, led on to another large room, which, from its bare furnishings, he judged was used as a music room. It formed a wing of the house to the north, under the shelter of the firs, and a small door opened directly out of the room to the hillside. Shades were drawn over the small windows, creating a pleasant dusk. As Jack stood in the doorway, he was conscious that some one was in the room, with that subtle intimation that body gives to body. At the extreme end there was a kind of recess, circled with tiny leaded-glass windows. A grand piano cut off this part of the room, and its raised cover formed a kind of screen between him and the window.

He moved down the room noiselessly. Then he stopped and coughed, but as no one appeared he walked on again, looking for the people he felt sure were there. He was not mistaken. Within the recess on a bench beneath the window Elsie was seated with a man, as though she had just moved from the piano. She was looking at the man with a peculiarly direct, feverish glance, the look that a woman gives when a long-expected crisis has come; when all is known, and she looks into the dark, hidden soul of her neighbor to seek even more. The man's arm rested on the casement; his hand was on a level with her neck, and very close to it, as if at the moment withdrawn from touching the soft curves of her chin. The instant of revelation, of intimacy, froze Jack to the spot where he stood. He seemed to read many secret pages—and then, finally, Elsie's eyes dropped, wandered, swept past the screen of the piano, and rested on Jack. She started, dropping from her hands some trinket. The object hit the floor with a sharp click and rolled beneath the piano. Thereupon the man turned his head, and straightened himself lazily into a more conventional position. Jack knew the face, though he had not seen it for a good many years.

He was much the most embarrassed of the three. Elsie was herself once more, and hurrying forward held out her hand with the frank cordiality of old days.

“Jack, Jack! And you never let me know! Why, I've been in a rage to see you, and I'll bet you have been here a week without letting me know, without coming *here*, first, and last, and all the time. Is there some one

else in the Neck, Jack? Some other girl in some other cottage? Roger," — she summoned her companion imperiously. "You remember Mr. Pemberton?"

Mather rose in a negligent, bored manner. He was in riding costume; the white trousers and lacquered boots had the pleasant affectation of an aristocratic amusement of other days. When Elsie drew his attention to Jack, he nodded indifferently and sat down at the piano, waiting for the interrupting episode to conclude. Elsie moved about restlessly, talking in impetuous, incomplete phrases.

"Come over here! Sit there," she ordered. "No, there! Turn your head and let me look at you."

She pulled up a low divan and sat very close to him, leaning forward, looking into his face, her lips parted in a happy smile, as if she would drink in the answers to her volley of questions.

"Yes, yes, — go on, go on. I want to hear all about every last thing. Stop thumping that piano, Roger!"

But Jack, still under the impression of that revealing moment, and constrained by the presence of Mather, who sauntered up and down the room, examining nothings with a detached air, biding his time, humoring the woman, was more dumb than ever. There was so little to tell: he had merely lived and worked, worked hard. He stated baldly the leading facts, — that he was to enter a law firm in New York, that he had persuaded his friend, Stevenson, to spend a few weeks at the Neck. Then he talked about Stevenson. "And you?" he ended.

"It will take hours! You will lunch with me, and I will talk you blind. It will be so nice to go all over it again, and tell you how I was presented, in London and in Rome, how fine I looked, and what a lot of beaux I had, and about Bushy in court dress. Oh! Bushy was great in court dress, wasn't he, Roger?"

Mather had completed the circle of the room, and was looking for something else to do.

"Why do you stand there like a stone!" Elsie exclaimed, in a burst of annoyance. "Go into the drawing-room and amuse yourself, or go home."

"I guess that's what I'll do," Mather drawled lazily. "Good-by, Elsie. *A ce soir.*"

He held out his hand to Jack, who rose and bowed in a prim fashion.

CHAPTER VII

“JACK!”

She took his hands and held them tightly while he waited in fear for the torrent of explanation and defence, which he knew was inevitable. But she said nothing about herself after all, and dropping his hands began to talk indifferently about Pemberton Neck, and the house, which seemed to have lost already some of the lustre of the new toy. She discussed the architect's ideas, cleverly using the proper vocabulary, evidently bored. Then she came back to him, his plans and hopes, and was reanimated for a moment only to wander off to a new field. And to avoid the inevitable topic he talked of himself, of his little triumphs in the steadfast plodding of the road.

But they were ill at ease, and at every corner of their talk they met the same idea. In one of the awkward pauses he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

“You think I am too low for blame!” she exclaimed impetuously. “You can't be angry.”

“Don't say that, Elsie,” he protested, at a loss what to say, touched by the feeling that she still cared for his opinion. “I wish—I wish I hadn't been there, hadn't seen,—that is all,” he faltered.

Her eyes flamed out at this, as if he had made an accusation.

"What have you seen? Don't imagine more than you have a right to! A woman has her friendships, even when she is married, and when a man has a *tendresse* —"

But she stopped. His steady eyes rather shamed her subterfuges. As he made no reply, she burst out again: —

"What am I, Jack? Tell me, won't you, what I am! I can't see. I have gone on from one step to another — I have lost the way. Oh! I wish I had been dead before you could despise me."

"I don't despise you, Elsie."

"You should, then. I haven't had the sand to play the game according to the rules. I was no fool when I married. I knew Bushy well, the good and the bad, and I took him deliberately, after considering it all for months. I said that was what I wanted, didn't I, Jack? there in the Park when I told you of my engagement? And I meant to be a good wife, to play fair —"

"You have," he affirmed, trying to stem the tempest.

"What's the use of your saying so!" Her voice grew hard and calmer, as she proceeded with the cynical analysis. "I've always said that the women who flirted, squeezed hands in corners, let men kiss their hands, then their arms, then anything except, — except the last thing, — were a mean lot. It would be better to go the whole way, to be honest to some one. But that's what *I* have done, after all — said no, and taken a bite; said no again and taken a larger bite. What do you think of me? I am not alone — there are hundreds and hundreds in my crowd, just like

that, or worse, and the world wags on — so long as we kiss in corners ! ”

She could see from the man's white face that she was wounding him more than herself. But the desire to tear, even his heart, to make the man's soul bleed, overmastered her. He leaned against the casement, drumming mechanically on the little panes, wondering that she could make them both so futilely wretched.

“ But no one understands what it has been,” she went on, softening to herself. “ My life is horrid, horrid. *He* doesn't care what I do, so long as I keep within the limits of our crowd. He would drive a woman to anything.”

“ Don't speak of him, Elsie ! ” Jack exclaimed irritably. “ It's pretty cheap to hunt for excuses, isn't it ? ”

“ I will, I will, I will,” she cried angrily. “ Do you suppose a woman would do even that, if she had anything to live for ? If I had a husband who was more than a block of wood, without ideas, without feelings, without fine ambitions — a man who will make money, money, money, lives in money, and would squeeze the life out of a friend for his money. He's proud of nothing but the fact that he's been trickier than the next man. Yes, — I know what you are going to say ; that's what I wanted. And *I* make him spend it. I'll spend millions before I am done, — everything he has. I'll ruin him, Jack. I'll ruin him — that would be some fun. He would *feel* that.”

“ Stop this, Elsie ! ” Jack ordered. “ If you keep on — it's useless. I am going.”

"Don't go yet! Don't leave me now! If you care the least bit, wait, Jack. I'll — I'll be decent. Just let me talk it out. I haven't in four years — really, I haven't, not to a soul, not to my mother, not to him. Be patient a bit, Jack."

"It's only that it will make it harder for you later on," he responded in a dead tone.

"Oh, no. It's better already. It's outside of me now. And I don't want you to think that I haven't done my share, that I haven't tried to make his marriage worth while. His own friends will tell you *that*. I have made his house something more than a rich man's eating and sleeping place. I have brought to the house people worth knowing, — clever people, influential people, distinguished men. He wants to be ambassador. Bushy wants to be ambassador!"

She laughed, and Jack joined in, relieved by this note of former gayety.

"Well, I think he will be ambassador, and he'll have me to thank if he's sent to Spain next spring."

"You will make a stunning ambassadress, Elsie."

"Oh! yes," she smiled. "I can do most things when I try — and he will think it's all his power, his money, and position. Mr. E. P. Cushing is not a generous man, even to his wife."

"But, Elsie," he protested. "After all, you've got —"

"What I bargained for, Mr. Lawyer. That's a pretty mechanical view, brother! Can a woman ever make an absolute contract? Does a contract hold in law when you've bargained to deliver something you *can't*?"

"Yes," he answered, with a smile. "You pay the forfeit."

"Well, I'm paying."

"That is what I want to be sure of."

"You think I am disloyal?" she flamed forth again.

"Not until you tell me with your own lips, which you won't, you can't!" he said, almost pleadingly. He had turned toward the door, but she stopped him, laying her hand affectionately on his arm.

"Don't go. Listen. Stay a moment. Listen."

She looked into his eyes with the old appeal, the honest, frank look of the untrained woman. There rose before him the vision of that other woman he had dreamed into being years before on the slopes of Green Hill. She had pleaded with the same tender, defeated, despairing eyes. And for that moment she was the more real, the living creature, and this clogged soul beating next him, a weaker, vaguer shadow. . . .

"Listen! I want to play fair. I want to live it out, to keep the contract, not just before the world, but really, absolutely, to the last dot of the last letter. To-day you saw the, the —"

"Don't say it, Elsie. I have seen nothing. You were only looking into the gulf — that's all."

"Yes, listen. He kissed me; I let him; I didn't try to avoid it. He'd wanted to lots of times — other men, too; I've always run away until then. But I thought, what's the use? What is so awful in it? I wanted to be kissed, to be loved a little that way. I am honest, Jack. No,

listen ! It was the first time, upon my honor — upon *your* honor, Jack."

He listened without trying to calm her or to escape. Involuntarily he crushed her hands in his grip until a wave of pain shot across her mobile face.

"And now ?" he whispered.

"God knows. Tell me what will happen."

He dropped her hands and laughed contemptuously.

"You know better than I, I guess. Either you stay, and are a liar and a coward, or you go, and are —"

"A liar and a sneak," she filled in. "Is there nothing else ?"

"Do you really care for *him* ?"

She paused, and then answered deliberately.

"I don't know. It might have been some other one, I suppose, with — with the same conditions."

He laughed as he had before, with a loud, unnatural sound that struck his own ears disagreeably.

"I think I'd make up my mind on that point first. You wouldn't want to have to try again."

She closed her eyes.

"Oh ! you couldn't have said that before ! Would you care very much, now ?"

"More than you, I think."

She shivered, and held out her hands impulsively.

"Help me ! Believe in me a little longer, trust me. You *did* care ! If I promise, if I go back — do you think I am big enough ?"

She appealed to him for strength, for will, confident in his power, with an instinctive grasp of his nature, know-

ing that he measured things differently from herself, or from those around her. She did not understand his life, but she read it large, magnified it in her human need for an ideal, for an unalterable will, a rocky purpose. And he, with all the faith of youth in the same power of the will, of the idea, of the resolve to conquer habit, passion, inheritance, flesh and nature, — all the giants with which the spirit strives, — felt that they two could make a promise that would control her life. This conviction of their spiritual power softened the hateful story, ennobled the weakness and triviality to which the woman confessed. So they stood, making this covenant as it were, looking at each other trustingly, without speaking, for they had spent their words on the sordid facts. At last she whispered: —

“Remember, you said you would always care!”

“Haven’t I!” he answered.

There were steps in the drawing-room. The afternoon sun had left the casement windows, and the twilight was filling the long music room. Mr. Cushing’s voice could be heard in the next room ordering a servant to light the fire, they walked toward him slowly, both feeling that their understanding was not quite complete, that more had to be said. Mr. Cushing was in evening dress, and, as he turned from the fireplace, he seemed to Jack whiter, stiffer, older, than ever. He had the same cunning scowl between his eyes, and the same ill-tempered droop to the lower lip.

“This is a pretty gloomy hole,” he observed, not noticing Jack. “Where’s Thompson? I thought you were out with Mather.”

"We returned some time ago," Elsie replied. "This is Mr. Pemberton."

"How do!" Cushing jerked out, holding forth a thin arm to the young man. Then he added to his wife: —

"You aren't going to dine in that rag, are you?"

Elsie paid no attention to the remark, but turned to Jack.

"You will stay to dinner?"

"Not to-day, Elsie," he said quickly. "I have stayed too long!"

"Not a moment," she answered, but she did not urge him to remain. She accompanied him down the long drawing-room, where the servant was lighting the lamps and the candles; she kept close to his side, looking up into his face, loath to have him go beyond her reach. When they were alone in the hall, she detained him to say one thing more.

"You'll come again very soon? And, Jack, you don't know half what it is. There are reasons — I am bound, hand and foot. But," — she uttered the words with a little gasp, — "I think I shall never — rebel — again."

Then she fluttered away up the dark staircase, and at the landing turned and waved her hand with a little of her old buoyancy. The missing Thompson appeared and opened the door with a flourish. As Jack stepped forth on the gravel drive, something more than the mere dusk of the evening blurred the landscape. The visions of his youth had been rubbed and tarnished, and he walked heavily in the uncertain gloom of the night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE "Bluefields Road" crossed the coast hills behind Pemberton Mills. It was a rough, rocky road, little frequented except by horseback riders. The Betts house was one of those rain-washed, gray shanties standing in the lush grass of an unkempt orchard to be found along the back roads of New England. An ell of the house had been torn down, and the timbers used for fire-wood. The scar where the gable was torn off was visible from the road.

The house with its orchard and meadow fields was in a little pocket behind the hills, beyond the beautiful coast. When Jack reached it one afternoon, the shadows were already stealing over the fields from the dark firs, and a cold dampness, like rank sweat, was rising from the meadows. A lean unshaven young man with faded eyes was smoking before the door. Jack recognized him as one of the gawky older boys that used to loaf about the Mills. In answer to Jack's greeting, he rose from the broken kitchen chair by the door and slouched down the path.

"Not many folks come this way," he observed wistfully, "'cept they want somethin' — berries or washin' or chickens."

"I came to see you and Ruth," Jack hastened to explain.

"She's pretty bad to-day," Betts said dolefully, spitting at an over-familiar chicken. "Jes' can't get around. I dunno exactly what's the matter, why she 'pears so low. No stuff does her much good."

The house, overrun with chickens who stalked proudly in and out of the door, wore the same air of expected misfortune that the man's remarks gave.

"I guess it's damp hereabouts," Betts suggested, spitting again.

When Jack asked to see Ruth, Betts led the way into a darkened room where his wife was lying on a bed, a dirty cotton comforter thrown over her figure.

"Jack!" she cried, with delight and surprise. "Ezra, how could you bring Mr. Pemberton into this messy room!"

"Don't get up," Jack urged, as Ruth raised herself, revealing untidy masses of brown hair. "I wanted to see you again before I went, and I may leave any time now. So I walked across the woods this afternoon."

"Goin' back to the city?" Ruth asked wistfully. "I was tellin' Ezra how you'd have a place on the Neck some day."

Betts left them to fetch the cow from the pasture, and when they were alone a sudden awkwardness made them silent.

"I just hate to have you see this," she repeated, pointing to the unkempt bed and the dirty child who was playing on the floor. "You'll think we ain't no pride. I guess we kind of giv' up! It's too much, too much!"

She began to cry silently.

"It's hard not to be well and so much to do."

"I don't blame *him*. He's done the best he can, but the children came, and he ain't the man to get on. And then I'm no good most of the time. But he's real kind to me — never complains. We're just played out."

Any denial would have been palpably false.

"Yes," she insisted, with a clear conception of her wasting life. "We're just used up. The worst of it is the children; they'll grow to do the same thing."

Then, with a feeling that she was putting forth her miseries indelicately, she tried to talk about other matters, — the girls they had known at the hotel, the village people, and the Neck. The luxury of this fashionable life fascinated her, like the pictures of high life in the story papers that came her way, or the florid paragraphs about the extremely rich in the newspapers. She told him the gossip of the doings at the Neck, the strange tales that start from the back steps, the kitchen verandas of cottages.

"You remember the picnic at the lake, and how those ladies came in? That Mis' Mather has been real kind — she stops in here most every week. I kind of thought when I heard you outside it might be her. She and Mis' Cushing are both real good. We heard that Mis' Mather was goin' to marry Mis' Cushing's brother, but it's been a long time now, and nothin' seems to come of it."

When Jack undertook to leave, Ruth begged him to stay.

"I don't cal'late to see you agin. I like to talk to

you — you seem so strong and well and happy. And we don't see much like that up here on the Bluefields Road."

So he lingered, and they talked about the same people all over again. The air was musty and close, and Jack insisted on building a fire in the big chimney. Then he played with the little boy, who brought out the contents of the wood-box for his inspection.

"It's him," Ruth murmured, looking at Jack meaningly, her weak white face ennobled for the moment by insight. "It's him! He'll be like — me, like his father, or worse."

This was the ghost that haunted her dying — the sense of inevitable repetition of fate. The young man started forward, moved beyond his habitual constraint by pity for the forlorn being who was withering away.

"Don't worry, Ruth! Something better will come!"

"No, it can't! There's no use talking. Them that's down in this world is down, and stays down unless a miracle happens."

"No, no," he expostulated. "Something will open for him. Don't worry over your babies. If I can, I will see that they start fair. Yes, I can, I know I can, and I will see that they start fair."

"Will you!" she exclaimed doubtfully.

"Yes, I promise," he answered, the first vague impulse of comforting the poor creature growing into a larger determination.

Her face flushed with the old weak trustfulness, the sweet-pea instinct to twist its tendrils about any firm prop.

"It may not be much, but I'll do that little. Ruth, I'll help them to start fair," he repeated.

"That's real good," she sighed. "I always knew you were kind, Jack."

She lay without speaking, exhausted by the unusual emotion. In the next room Betts was preparing the evening meal and talking to the baby. As Jack was leaving the sick-room, some one came up the path from the road.

"That's Mis' Mather," Ruth whispered more animatedly, and drew herself from the pillows, attempting to smooth her hair.

Jack had not seen Miss Mather since the evening when he had been with Stella and Liddy, and she had so obviously overlooked him in the foyer of the theatre. Now she bowed slightly to him and turned directly to the sick woman.

"I am not going to stay," she explained, as Jack bade Ruth good-by.

"It's kind of late for you to be goin' thro' them pines alone," the sick woman observed.

"I will wait outside for you, if I may," Jack offered.

Miss Mather agreed to his proposal not very cordially.

Outside, the dark twilight line had crept from the fir trees to the house. A streak of red across a fluffy cloud betrayed the last gleam of the sun, that was setting over the bay in the more open land. Jack took the broken chair beyond the sound of the voices inside and tilted it against the gray shingles. Silence seemed to steal out of the forest, to envelop the unkempt house like the mists of

evening, surrounding it with a vast desert of loneliness. The sick woman within was struggling in this loneliness, this abandonment to silence. As he thought of his promise to her about her babies, he was strangely glad. It was the happiest thought he had had for months. He would see her once more and make the thing clearer to her so that the peace of it would be fuller. There was a subtle pleasure in the thought, strange in his isolated life, that in all the dark perplexity, the numb touch that the world gave, these helpless people offered the precious warmth of humanity.

Miss Mather came from the house at last, pulling on her gloves thoughtfully, and without speaking they started up the road. He noticed that she was thin and her face was worn, the muscles of the mouth quivering now and then as if her apparent composure needed a distinct tension of the will. She held herself erect and walked well, with a little air of aloofness. Not every transient wayfarer could get close enough to Isabelle Mather to know what passed beneath the quivering face. He wondered what had become of her engagement: he had meant to ask Elsie.

"I am afraid she can't get to church again. I was going to send the carriage to-morrow," Miss Mather remarked at last.

The reflection seemed to Jack irritatingly trivial.

"What does she want to go to church for!" he exclaimed harshly. "She's good enough for any world that's better than this."

"I didn't mean that. She sees people, you know. It's about the last tie she has to society, and she's always brighter afterwards."

"Oh!" Jack responded, mollified.

"As long as she could sell berries, it was different. She can't outlive the winter, I'm afraid."

"I hope not. It must be dreadful, the winter here."

"But her children," the woman protested softly. "Every month of pain can be endured for them. Poor thing!"

"Yes, poor thing," he repeated bitterly without knowing why. "Poor dumb thing!"

Just ahead of them on the edge of a small hill a man was splitting wood in front of a cottage. As he raised his axe, which was caught in a block of wood, his large muscular figure was outlined against the sky. Again and again he raised the axe, swiftly, surely, revealing the reach of his arm, the perfect working of his strong body. The two walkers involuntarily stopped to watch him.

"That is so great!" Miss Mather murmured as to herself. "That is power, force."

"And you like it?"

"I love to see power more than anything in the world! Force, force!" she repeated in rhythm to the axe. "Oh, for more power, like that!"

There was something spontaneous in her cry, as if the secret of her pale face had slipped unconsciously from her lips. There was no need to explain the reason of

her long engagement. She had evidently learned the central weakness of the man she loved.

"I had rather see the other thing — repose," Jack rejoined. She closed her lips, and they started forward. On the other side of the hill they caught sight of two people on horseback, who had emerged from a cross-road.

"That must be Roger and Elsie," Miss Mather observed, watching them plunge into the dark gulf of the wooded road. "How she rides! As she does everything else,—as though it were the only moment she had to live."

"There's enough force for you," Jack said with spleen. "And what comes of it?"

"I should say a great deal: she makes many people very happy."

"Is *she* happy?"

"Why shouldn't you think so? I am sure no one could say that she was unhappy."

Her cautious answers irritated him. She was always on the right side of the fence. He resented her fine breeding, her reserve. She must know Elsie's situation a thousand times better than he did, in a way, but she would be very careful not to let him know that she did.

"Most of us see very little of Elsie," Miss Mather continued. "She's too busy to have intimates. She can never give more than a quarter of a minute to any one, but she makes you feel as if you were the only person in the world for that quarter of a minute. She's the most marvellous woman I know," she continued in tranquil analysis. "Elsie does and says the most unpardonable

things — if it weren't Elsie. But it is Elsie, and you forgive her. Some people can risk breaking a good many commandments."

"Because she says in French what can't be said in English, and rides like the devil, I suppose?" Jack suggested truculently.

"Oh, no! Lots of women in her set do that. Because she makes you feel that she's the most important person in the world. She's horribly egotistic and spoiled. Elsie is a mere wonder! And I think" — she turned her grave eyes to the man to impress upon him her words — "Mr. Cushing is an excellent husband for her."

"So that seems to you quite the ideal marriage?" he queried brusquely.

"And, pray, why not? Elsie loves luxury and power."

Jack, thinking of the tall man's figure that was riding ahead of them so close beside Elsie, retorted ironically:—

"It's pretty hard to tell what any woman does love most, isn't it?"

Again Miss Mather's cool eyes studied the man's face, as if she were wondering where to place him. After some deliberation, she replied:—

"I don't think you can give any general answer to that question, do you?"

The safe commonplace baffled Jack once more. He had found out nothing about Elsie from this carefully trained, self-possessed young woman, and he knew that he had given a rather poor account of himself. On all the rare occasions when he had been thrown with Miss Mather, from the time when they met as children in the

summer house, he had been at a disadvantage. She seemed to possess a peculiar ability of showing him to himself as crude, raw, and common — in short, as one of the people whom she did not ordinarily meet. They walked more rapidly, anxious to finish this enforced tête-à-tête.

"You will go to Elsie's ball Saturday, of course?" Miss Mather asked idly to make conversation.

"I don't know," he answered shortly. "I might as well begin my work at once, and balls won't be a part of that."

The girl smiled.

"But if you want to see Elsie at her best, with all her train, you should go to the ball. She's giving it for the foreigners she has been entertaining. The German ambassador will be there, and a lot of gay people are coming to the Neck just for that. It will be the great event of our season. You had better stay over for it," she added, good naturedly, as though advising a boy to behave himself.

Then she spoke of her brother Ned, who was the spoiled child of the family. Nominally he was supposed to be in a broker's office in New York, but having hurt his leg in a polo match the year before he had had an excuse for not confining himself to business. The General and she were to return to the Riverside home this fall and live there permanently. She did not seem to regret giving up the enjoyments of New York, and looked forward with pleasure to the tranquil winter months in the old house on the hill. As she talked, Jack realized the womanly

maturity which underlay her reserved manners. She possessed, in contradistinction to Elsie, character, in the usual sense of the term. Even her commonplaces were significant of that, and, albeit unwillingly, his nature responded to that element in hers. When they reached General Mather's driveway, she extended her hand cordially and said:—

"I hope I have persuaded you about Saturday. I'm sure it will do you good—I mean you will have a good time," she corrected swiftly, noticing Jack's smile. Then with a rapid change of mood, she asked meaningfully: "Why aren't we—Elsie's friends and mine—as entertaining as *other* women?"

Jack noticed the sudden emphasis of her tone. He remembered the servants' picnic, and the foyer of the New York theatre when she had seen him with Stella and Liddy. He blushed with embarrassment as he answered:—

"I suppose they are. I don't make any distinctions."

"Indeed!"

CHAPTER IX

HE had waited for hours, standing by the open window in the dark corner of the veranda, watching the people eat and dance, and listening to the broken fragments of talk that fell around him. Early in the evening before the dancing had begun, Elsie had passed him in the crush, leaning on the ambassador's arm, and had stopped to give him a special welcome.

"Isabelle said you would come," she whispered with a malicious little smile. "Been flirting with Isabelle? She's in the music room, and wants to see you. Isabelle is a good one to begin with, Jack. Don't keep company with the stars!"

He had been too dull to enter into her gay mood, that sparkled like the stones in her brown hair. He had never seen her so excited with the pleasant incense of success. The black pupils of her eyes swam in a mist beneath the dark fringe of lashes. Her mouth quivered in childlike ripples of joy. She had kept the ambassador waiting while she leaned confidentially toward him and laid her hand affectionately on his arm. The skin of her arm, he remembered, had a rose flush like the transparent flesh of her temples.

"I want to see you—again," he stammered. "I'm going to-morrow."

"No, no, not to-morrow," she pleaded, all for him in the moment that she stole from another. "After to-morrow we shall be very quiet, and we could have some good times, the old times. Promise me you won't go to-morrow? There are some matters, very important ones. I want your help. Promise me you will wait."

He had stammered something, confused by the crowd, and the curious eyes that were upon them both. Finally he had said no, he could not stay on, and she had replied hurriedly: "Very well, later to-night, after supper, there will be time."

With a smile she had drawn back from the window, and with a fresh smile and a word to her waiting escort had swept into the vortex of people beyond his vision. So he had staid on, for Elsie never forgot and never disappointed. It was less for the news she wanted to tell him, — some trivial thing, — than for one more chance to see the face he loved, alert and happy with success. He watched her go out to supper with the ambassador, and then return to the music room to dance with the French attaché, then with Roger Mather, who, he was forced to admit, was much the handsomest, most distinguished young man in the room. Stevenson was dancing with Miss Mather. Her face and dress struck him as colorless and subdued among all the rich tints, the vivacious faces, that surrounded her. She danced listlessly, wearily, and Stevenson was soon dancing with another. He was to take the early morning train, and was absorbing to the full the last moments of his vacation.

Mr. Cushing came out upon the veranda to smoke,

stalking back and forth behind Jack, now and then looking at the dancers with an impassive, imperturbable air. Others came to the cool, dark veranda to flirt for a fraction of an hour. On the lips of all, in the corners, in the smoking-room, among the casual lovers, Jack caught the refrain of Elsie's triumph.

"It is Mrs. Cushing's night."

"She keeps her baby looks."

"Those foreign chaps know a good American thing," a man observed complacently in the smoking-room.

"She never spares herself," a young woman commented enviously. "And she never shows it, not a line."

And once while he was following her with his devouring eyes, Miss Mather spoke to him.

"Worshipping too? It was worth coming for, wasn't it? You couldn't get a better frame for your goddess. There are times when Elsie is not at ease, but she carries everything with her here. I could just follow her about and adore, as you have done all the evening. You see she isn't for one, but for all."

Her tone had a little malice in it, as though she were laughing at his rustic admiration. Yet he was glad to see her, and when she made a place for him he sat down beside her to talk. But his mind wandered from her to the dancers, and when Elsie left the room he became restless.

"You don't enjoy yourself," Miss Mather observed.

"You have to learn this thing early, I suppose," he admitted. "It doesn't belong to my life."

"Why not to you, as much as to the next one?"

"Because, — why, I have just work ahead."

"Does that keep you from playing?"

"Yes, this kind of play. My work can't be with these people," he answered brusquely, "nor my play. I am a mere stranger, who has happened in by mistake and who will go back to his bench to-morrow."

Miss Mather pondered his remarks seriously. He puzzled her.

"These are working people, too."

"Not in my way. I've always belonged to the plain workers, and I don't know how to do this. Pancoast Lane is a long way off, isn't it?"

She blushed at his gaucherie, his insisting on matters that were usually overlooked.

"Do you want to learn?" she asked.

"No—I don't believe I do. I thought once I did—it was the chief thing I worked for, I believe."

He did not say that Elsie had given him that ambition, and that to be of the world which Elsie loved and admired had been the secret spring of much toilsome effort. To-night that fact seemed silly and childish. He could never be like these other people, and he had a crude dislike of them because they had cheapened for him his dream of Elsie.

"It isn't really worth while," Miss Mather mused. "One learns it easily, not as well perhaps as Elsie, but well enough. There are other things to learn, to do, and I suppose you mean to do them."

Her voice was singularly earnest, and her eyes had an unexpected fire.

"Just now it doesn't seem very clear what is worth doing," he admitted frankly.

"Everything!" she exclaimed. "To work out something good in life, some achievement!"

"Do you suppose you'd feel any better if you did?"

She glanced at him coldly, and then seeing the troubled expression of his face, she said gently: —

"For one thing you make life better and easier for others."

There was something personal in this, which he was curious to understand, but a man broke in upon their talk, and he did not see her again.

Then Jack talked to the older women whom he knew. They had supped very well, and did not listen to his conversation, their eyes following the movements of the younger people with unquenched enthusiasm. So he relapsed into gazing at the brilliant faces of the women. To his uncritical eyes they were all lovely, with delicate features and vivacious, sympathetic eyes,—all dainty and seductive,—the decorative, floral tracery of the world. The heat of the room, the recurring bars of dance-music, the maze of changing features slowly hypnotized him until the scene seemed to have repeated itself over and over in his consciousness, like some symbolical movement.

Gradually the ranks thinned, and the voices grew louder. He could distinguish discordant bursts of laughter, and awkward lurching movements. The champagne and heat were taking their effect. It was nearly three o'clock, and those couples that had stayed went out to

the dining room for a second supper. This was more noisy and boisterous than the former one in spite of the diminished numbers. Only intimates seemed to have remained. Jack was on the point of hunting up Stevenson to take him to his train, when Elsie slipped from the supper-room and laid her hand on his arm.

"Let's go out on the veranda," she said wearily. "They are so noisy they won't miss us. I am nearly dead, and the end isn't yet. Did you like me this evening?" she asked with her usual egotism.

"I never knew how beautiful you were!"

She smiled, pleasantly soothed by his unreserved admiration.

"I think I was rather fit, myself. The young and old, my infant class and my old guard, have done their prettiest, too. But goody! I am tired. What's that, a fire at sea?" She pointed to a spot of light above Seal Island.

"Merely the first streak of dawn above Seal Island, Elsie. Time for bed!"

"I don't want to go to bed! Do you remember, Jack, the afternoon we spent over on the rocks there; how I gave you your first lessons about the world and things? How green I was, and how I loved to teach you!"

"I remember that better than I remember anything."

"What good days we had that September! Sometimes I think all the really best times of my life I have had with you, Jack."

She clung very close to his arm, gazing out at the advancing dawn above Seal Island. Fresh shouts of

laughter mingled with loud cries reached them from the supper-room.

"Billy Enders is doing stunts, I suppose. I hope they'll leave some glass unbroken," Elsie observed.

"I know I oughtn't to keep you!" Jack exclaimed reluctantly.

"They're happy, and I am happy to be here with you like this, dear Jack!"

She touched his shoulder with her head affectionately for a moment. He trembled involuntarily, and spoke with mechanical slowness.

"I am glad I saw this, Elsie. To-night convinces me that you chose right, that you are really happier so—than without all this. You may want something more, now and then, but you'll say to yourself, 'No, I have what I really want,' won't you?"

"Don't lecture me, Jack. Just let me stand here and forget what I am. I don't want to think of myself just yet."

So they stood watching the eastern glow without speaking until he noticed that she shivered.

"You are getting cold."

"No, I was thinking of something. Fetch me that cloak if you want to. I was thinking of to-morrow."

"Don't think of to-morrow!" he responded more gayly.

"I must. There'll be a terrible scene with Bushy. He's a Turk! I can say it to you, Jack. I can say anything to you. It isn't like talking to the other men—you understand. He's been waspish all the summer—doesn't like that little Duroy, I believe he doesn't

mind how many men I have around me, so long as I keep to Americans, but he doesn't like foreigners. He can't speak the language, and when we talk French he doesn't know what we're saying, and thinks it must be scandalous. He almost made a fuss at dinner to-night, and he's sulking now in the smoking-room. Don't you see why I have to have my excitements? I can't, I can't drop people, and give up my interest in men. I couldn't play out the farce! And I can't shut my doors on people, every one he takes it into his head to be nasty about. He hates all the interesting ones. If they haven't money, if they are just artists or actors or clever, he insults them — insults them in his own house! And if they have position, and he doesn't dare to insult them, he takes it out of me. Oh, Jack, you always make me think, and I hate thinking."

He held her hot hand in his broad palm, and caressed it gently as he would a child's. In the pallor of the morning dusk her sparkle had gone out. For the first time he could see lines of experience and nervous exhaustion creep into her face.

"So you won't stay over even one day for me?" she resumed peevishly. "You think I am altogether horrid to say such things as I tell you. Well, I feel 'em, and lots worse beside. And you're wrong in saying that *this* pays. I am not so cheap as that! Why don't I break off then and live apart? You don't know how things tie themselves into ten thousand knots. There's Frank! He's gone and made a mess of things in business, and Bushy's got to help him out. Father hasn't a

cent — that's another story! Ugh! I wonder sometimes there aren't more of those horrible newspaper stories about husbands that die poisoned, or suicides by wives!"

She broke off with a laugh.

"You think I am pretty far gone? But you care a little still, just a little? Tell me!"

She took the lapels of his coat and played with them, pulling him nearer to her, in the irresistible desire for sympathy.

"I can see nothing, nothing, not five minutes ahead! If I were only like you, Jack! But women aren't made that way. They haven't the power to live along without getting what they want. You'll find a better woman, Jack; some one who will love enough — I am a selfish, useless thing, and *you* make me feel it. And that's why I can't let you go to-night, for I don't know how long. I want to say something to you, make that promise, you remember. I want to have it to think of when — I am just ready to forget everything. We can't talk of it to-night, but to-morrow, to-morrow —"

"Where are you hiding, Mrs. Cushing?" a jovial voice broke in behind them. "It's dangerous watching *sunrises*. Miss Dominic is going to —"

"You're wanted inside, Elsie," Roger Mather interrupted. "They're getting pretty lively."

Jack followed Mather and Elsie into the house to hunt for Stevenson, who had probably forgotten all about his train. He found him in the smoking-room, surrounded by a group of hilarious young men, who were laughing

loudly at stories which they had not heard. Other men were stretched out on the divans, overcome by champagne and sleep. One middle-aged man — a well-known lawyer — had slipped from the leather chair where a friend had placed him, and lay in a knot on the floor. As Jack entered, he raised his head, blinked feebly at the electric light, and sank back with a contented sigh.

"This is what I call a thoroughly husky party," Stevenson observed genially to Jack, when he was reminded of his train. "It's worth while missing the train to see so much good society unbend."

He insisted on making his farewells to Mrs. Cushing. They found her in the music room with the remaining guests. All the people who could be accused of having serious tastes had taken their departure long before. Those who had "stayed on" seemed to have counted especially on this end of the night. An impromptu vaudeville was in progress. When the two men entered, a rather plump young married woman had just finished a dance upon a table and was being lifted to the floor by young Enderson amid much uproar. Then Elsie began the accompaniment of a popular song, and a little fluffy-haired girl sang the French words. Her childlike face emphasized the *sous-entendu* of the lines; at times the company drowned her thin voice and the tinkle of the piano by stamping their feet, clapping and howling the chorus, which seemed very familiar. One of the servants was serving champagne and removing the empty glasses out of the reach of the boisterous guests. His white, sleepy face, as he performed his task mechanically, con-

trasted amusingly with the perspiring, purple countenances of the feasters.

"Come on," Stevenson exclaimed gruffly. "It turns my stomach when the women begin to mix in this kind of thing."

Jack nodded. It reminded him of the servants' picnic when Elsie had shown her contempt for the vulgar. He remembered oddly that Miss Mather had not been offended that night. He pictured to himself the sneer on her fine, regular face at this performance. She could never tolerate the common thing, the sensual abandonment of self, such as this.

A servant lay stretched on the hall-seat, snoring. The two young men let themselves out of the house and walked to the stables for their trap. There the grooms and maids from the large house, and the ladies' maids who were waiting for their mistresses, were entertaining themselves with champagne and ices. While the drunken groom was bringing their horse and carriage, they watched the servants carouse.

"They aren't so rowdy as the others!" Stevenson commented, taking the horse from the groom.

As they whirled rapidly down the drive, the notes of the chorus to the French song shouted in every key floated out from the cottage on the Head.

CHAPTER X

AFTER Jack had bidden Stevenson good-by at the station, he sent the carriage back to the hotel and started over the hills in the direction of Pemberton Mills. Now that he had put off leaving at Elsie's request, he had time to spare and no desire to sleep. The cheerfulness of the dawn, which spread with a certain solemnity and fresh grace across the hills, soothed him and laid to rest the distorted, incoherent thoughts that beset him these days. He was glad to think of seeing Elsie once more, and subtly touched with gratitude that she cared for him, — useless as he was in all her perplexities, — and did him the grace to pour out to him her stormy heart. When he stopped to consider her calmly, to ponder her vehement accusations and lamentations, he judged her narrowly and hardly. But this morning, with the touch of her hands still on his arm, he was unwarrantably happy. He could believe that she would still win peace and power over herself, and that he could in some dark fashion save her from her more desperate moods.

As he reached the Cove, a light mantle of morning mist was rising from the sea and wrapping itself about High Head. He wondered if the revel up there had come to an end at last. With a feeling of disgust at the men and women whom he had left drinking and

romping in the cottage, he passed the silent lodge. Beyond, beneath the cliff, a path led through the woods around the Point. Elsie and he had often taken it in preference to the high-road, and he wondered if it still remained, after Cushing had improved the property. In the idleness of his mood, he climbed over the stone wall and pushed his way through the undergrowth to the shore. After a few moments he was on the path, walking out to the Point, following aimlessly the convolutions of the steep shore-line. He passed beneath the Cushings' stables, where the servants of the belated guests were still carousing.

Finally he stopped, not knowing how close to the house the path might lead him; he had no wish to return to the party. The slanting rays of the sun were burning off the mist that rose from the cold water. The sun seemed to struggle with the heavy spirits of the night, now dissipating for a space the thin vapors, and again shrouding itself in fresh banks of fog. Yet, he thought the sun would conquer, making a resplendent September day. Under the thick firs it was still dark, and his feet tripped over the interlacing roots of the trees. His mind glowed with thoughts of Elsie, brighter conceptions struggling with his gloomy doubts, as the sun's warmth contended with the fog. She was a braver soul, tenderer and truer than his harsh judging admitted. He was hard — she suffered, and her words were but her impulsive, wild, rebellious self. All would come out right! And when she had subdued herself to acceptance of her fate, she would make her acceptance magnificent,

full and cordial and sweet, like her gentle self, that he had loved for years, would always love.

He had already begun to retrace his steps when a movement among the firs above him caught his attentive ears. At first it seemed the snapping of a dead branch. Then, as he listened, he heard a human sound—a murmur of voices, and through the thick branches he saw the outline of figures on the path above him. Some servants playing the game of their masters! But he turned, without purpose, and swiftly climbed back on the path until he was on a level with the figures, and suddenly beyond a wide-reaching branch that stretched across the path, he came upon them. The man was in evening dress, the woman in a long gray cloak, which Jack remembered he had taken from the hall to cover Elsie with. Their backs were turned to him, but he knew—and for a moment he thought to escape. The woman's form muffled in the cloak was clinging to the man, a passive weight, one arm slipping in nerveless abandonment from the folds of the garment. . . .

The man raised his head and looked at Jack, then spoke to the woman, who sprang forward.

“Jack! It's Jack! Why, I thought you had gone—hours ago—”

Her voice broke harshly in the attempt to gain her usual assurance, and the face looked gray and hard in the pallid light beneath the trees.

“Why, why,” she resumed, summoning her quick will. “Why did you come back?”

Jack shook, as if the dank morning air had given him

an ague. He listened, seemed to wait for her to say something, and did not reply. But he blocked the path; Elsie began again: —

“We have been having a morning walk to get cool — it’s been such a stuffy night. We found this old path — the path along the shore —”

“Don’t lie, Elsie,” Jack interrupted in a monotonous voice.

At the words Elsie shivered, and again her face set hard and gray. She gathered the cloak about her and took Mather’s arm. Jack pushed back into the trees to let them pass. She walked unsteadily, as if the champagne she had drunk had suddenly gone to her head, and Mather supported her. But she pushed him from her and walked ahead more surely, passing Jack without a glance. As Mather followed close behind, something in his face, — half sneer, half-irritated self-contempt, a mere flicker of hatred for the person who caused this scene, — caught the eye of the trembling man, whose arm he almost knocked as he sauntered past in the narrow path. The foolish trembling ceased, and in a moment the hot blood surged over Jack once more. Blindly, purposely, with the inarticulate cry of the beast, he threw himself on Mather. The force of his spring carried Mather from his feet, and together the men rolled across the slippery path, and crashed into the underbrush beneath. Mather seized his enemy about the neck, and Jack fought to wrench himself free. The pent-up strength of his peasant people rose in his blood, uncontrolled by thought of decency, of self, of any catas-

trophe. One desire, one thirst, one fever, possessed him, — to kill this man, whom he hated, who had been base enough to take the woman he loved when she was weak.

In the struggle they fell and rolled over the steep bank, fighting wildly, Jack's hand at the other's throat, his neck bent and twisted in Mather's grip. Thus they plunged together down the bank, rolled over the cold ledge of the shore, and with a final lurch fell into the water. The one conscious idea that filled Jack's mind was the desire to choke the throat he held in his hand, to throttle the man's life, to kill him first where they lay like dogs in a shallow pool. The icy sea lapped their faces. The man in the convulsive grasp of Jack's broad hand relaxed his grip, groaned and gagged. Mechanically, unconsciously, feeling himself free, Jack raised the limp head in his hand and banged it against the rocky bottom of the pool. He dug his knees into the breast to get a firmer hold, and beat the head back and forth.

"Will you murder him! Stop, Jack, stop! Jack, stop, will you murder him!"

Elsie seized his arm and dragged it back. He threw her off roughly.

"Are you mad? You will kill him! you will kill him!" she shrieked, trying to pinion his arms.

The hysterical tones of her voice broke the tension in his mind. He let the head fall back into the pool and straightened himself, looking vacantly at Elsie.

"You have killed him!" she cried, dragging Mather's limp head from the tide and pillowing it on a rock. "Why don't you kill me?"

Jack's arms twitched, and he strode toward her. She cowered down beside Mather and waited for the blow. But Jack looked at the motionless figure of the man.

"Is he dead?" he whispered hoarsely. "Is he dead yet, Elsie?"

Elsie wiped the still face with her handkerchief, and presently Mather moaned and opened his eyes.

"Go home! go home at once! Get away," Jack ordered, in his normal voice. As she hesitated, still wiping the bleeding face, he repeated angrily: "Go home. The man is alive. I will attend to him. Get out of this!"

He grasped Mather's shoulders and drew him to the bank, placing him carefully among the bushes.

"I will find some one to help me," he said calmly. And as Elsie still lingered he added roughly: —

"You can do no good. *Get away!*"

Elsie obeyed, hurrying up the bank. At the top she looked back and saw Jack bending over the body in the bushes; then she hurried on toward the house.

CHAPTER XI

THE rosy daybreak had given false promise. A thick, dull gray strip of fog laced the sea-line, and every minute broadened, as though a greasy fluid had been poured out upon the glassy surface of the water. Two young men, who were getting ready a seine-boat at the head of the cove, looked searchingly from time to time at the open sea and made remarks. They encouraged each other to believe well of the day, but did not hasten their preparations. Finally they moored the heavy boat in deep water and lit their pipes. The figure of a man, hatless, with torn shirt and rumpled coat, could be seen, stumbling over the rocky shore, coming towards the boat. As he drew near, they recognized young Pemberton, and hailed him, asking what was the matter. He told them briefly that a man had fallen into the water off High Head and had disabled himself. He directed them where to find the injured man, and jumping into the boat, called out:—

“I will sail around and help you take him off in the boat.”

The two fishermen, stupefied by the man's excitement, asked no questions, but set off by the shore path whence Jack had come. With nervous haste, Jack trimmed the sails and got the lumbering seiner under way. He headed

for the point of the Neck, which was marked by the roof of the Cushing cottage.

The cheerful lap of the little morning waves soothed the passions of the man. The soft tug of the tiller under his arm helped him to think more connectedly, to see things clearer. Mather was not dead, nor very seriously hurt, he believed. He had spoken quite rationally before Jack left to seek help. He had not killed him. He was glad of it now! The fishermen would find Mather thirsty and ill-tempered, and the three of them could get him into the boat. Then he would let them sail the injured man over to the General's cottage, and take himself off, away from Pemberton Neck forever!

The tide, stronger than the fitful shore breeze, swept the seiner out by High Head close to the iron-stained ledges at the foot of the cottage. The fog, which was threading inshore rapidly, shifted for a moment and revealed near at hand above him the broad veranda, the gable ends of the house. As his eyes rested there, he saw a woman's arm cautiously reach out and draw in the blinds of a window on the second floor. For an instant before the broad blind swung in, he caught sight of a white figure gazing out at the fog. Abandoning the tiller, he stood up and strained his eyes to recognize the woman. Her attention, too, was attracted by the boat. She lingered at the window, watching intently. . . .

The boat came into the wind; the little waves slapped against the prow more querulously. Jack grasped the tiller and set his face from the land. A moment more

a filmy, damp shadow fell from the sky, completely enveloping the boat. The cottage was gone; the iron-stained ledges fast faded into the streamers of the fog-bank, which filtered into the Bay from the open sea. He still held the heavy boat on her course, regardless of the encroaching fog, which disguised the long, thin reefs that ran out into the Bay. Thicker and thicker came the fog, in banks, in fast filing clouds. The wind had shifted and was blowing steadily, faster than the silent fog-banks. He no longer knew how he was headed.

The fog was thick like greasy water, heavy and bringing heaviness to the heart of the man, — something insubstantial like the forms of fear against which man vainly casts himself. The impalpable waste divided before him, swallowed him and his craft, and immediately closed stealthily behind him, pressing him on all sides with dreary, silent insistence. The land might be a stone's throw from him; it might be in another planet. A puff of wind might tear the veil asunder for a moment, but for a moment only. Long threads of grayish white drew across the sails, leaving bright beads of moisture, and the water gurgled mournfully beneath the bowsprit.

He liked the cold touch of the fog, which bathed his heated breast like a damp sponge. He liked the sense of motion, of cleaving a way through vast gulfs of yielding air. The isolation, the will-less motion from this world to others, — on, elsewhere, beyond, — calmed his chafed spirit. The brutal outburst of bloody desire faded, and he knew himself no longer. The man Mather, the woman he had loved, took on the pitiful ghostliness

of the uncertain fog, and human anger became as the inarticulate expostulation of wraiths. Through the grayish waves there sounded the thud of lazily heaving billows on a rocky shore—some island ahead, some hard speck in the swimming vacuity of fog-land! He neither courted it nor fled from it. As the seiner swept on under the wind, a bell-buoy clanged its harsh note, which soon softened into uncertainty in the fog, as though the bell were muffled in felt. In his lethargy he cared little whether he was to bring up on the Bull Reef or some other ledge of the treacherous coast. The world that had struggled into being, the world that he had created faithfully in abstinence and with longing effort, was dissolving and floating away, like the streamers of mist that swept across the sails.

A small, weak cause for this wreck of a man's world, he told himself. A woman that would take her cheap pleasure! There were other men and women to believe in and a world to gain yet. But of that he knew nothing now. All such reasonableness of a sensible man had fled when his hand was on Mather's throat. She, too, was created of mist,—insubstantial, deceptive, fleeting! The love that he had given her, the very elements of courage and manliness which she had first given him, vanished as the illusions of a silly youth. Again and again, while he clung to the wet tiller, he tried to summon his courage, as a general calls upon his reserve; he put forth his will to remember the world as it stood before this fog. Again and again it was swallowed up until the sail and the waves, the wet boat and his clammy

body were drifting in the billowy waste. There was nothing firm and abiding; he was nothing.

She had used him as a plaything for her virtuous moods. She had spilled the sentimental yearnings of her soul in his ears. They had made a solemn covenant of will together, and in a few hours she had taken her life of pleasure, like a common woman, stealing from her husband's house! She was no other than Stella and Liddy, and less than the little waitress.

All the selfishness and egotism of her nature were stripped bare before him. He had thought her cold and chaste, almost unwomanly hard, and so she was for him. She would not sin with him. But in her heart she was carnal. A strange desire, an unknown brutality, took possession of him. He would go back to her and master her. A time would come in her facile heart for him. From one man to another she would turn, pushing her unappeased desires for pleasure a little farther each time, demanding more license, more brutal sensations. All the animal instincts of his nature, hitherto repressed and scourged by his strong will, asserted themselves with feverish visions. He remembered how soft and white her flesh had seemed that very night. There were treasures of voluptuousness in the woman. He had held her as the chief of his reverences, but she was a thing to use like other coarse vessels,—to use and throw away. The round, white arms, the arching lips that would tremble in passion, the mottled flush of her warm skin, the scent of her hair, the abandon of her desirable person. . . .

That was the part of a man—to wait and use her

when his turn came in the round of her desires, to satisfy this horrible lust and forget, — not to sit here like a shivering idiot, soaking in this rotting fog. As Steve said, he was ignorant of life, a green country boy who did not know how to make himself comfortable among men.

The seiner came heavily into the wind and fell off, wallowing into the bosom of the fog, its track wiped from the oily waters as it passed. A sickly gleam of warmish sun permeated the damp: the day was getting on; by the time he reached Pemberton Neck, the sea-turn would have been swept away and the ordinary raw landscape of life would appear. He must get to work, make his money, and learn to satisfy his wants, like the other animals, at the huge feeding-trough of life. . . .

She had led him to this defilement of soul where there was nothing but lust, — lust and hate. He had dreamed her walking fearlessly with generous heart, pure and daring, foolish but sound and sweet. He saw her now as a mere soft, pleasant-bodied playfellow, — a stimulating gamester to win from. It was but a boy's dream the other world of restraint and noble desires, — the life of the soul. The only world — real or unreal — was the world that touched these sharp senses. He laughed insolently in the dreary fog, and stretched his numb limbs. He was something of a man; his long well-nourished body, his smoothly thumping heart, his heavy hands and powerful arms appealed to him in a new way. "An engine of mortality," he muttered. Yes! an engine that had its work of destruction before it.

In the eagerness of this new purpose, he fixed the tiller

and hunted through the lockers for a compass. This he dusted carefully and set beside him on the seat. He was impatient with the folly that had blown him hither and thither for hours. He was hungry and cold; his good body reminded him of the idiotic neglect he had paid it. He would feed it grossly enough when he got safe out of this. Elsie would find a new man — would she like him?

The whistle of a large vessel bellowed close at hand, and in a moment bellowed again impatiently like a helpless beast blindfolded among dangers. He listened for the note. It was not the whistle of a local boat. He judged it to be the St. John's steamer: he had been blown far out to sea. The wind freshened, bringing in thick volumes of the muddy fog, and the seiner's tackle groaned. Suddenly the black side of a steel steamer loomed up over his quarter like the flank of a monster, and at the same instant the fog-whistle bellowed. A man peered down from the bridge at the coatless, hatless figure in the little boat; the steamer's screw kicked up a little spume, and the monster moved off slowly, bellowing in grievous complaint.

He shook the compass; it bobbed to and fro aimlessly, worthlessly. He was lost, fast enough! He crouched back beside the tiller, the warmth of his fierce passions chilled by the shrouding fog. He would not reach the Neck — he no longer cared to. Elsie had gone, disappeared like this phantom of a boat. The new idols of his foolish imagination had taken themselves away and with them had flown desire. Blank waste remained, like

these fog-swept waters through which he was plunging, wallowing, groaning. The voices of the world struck muffled on his deadened ears, moaning, as ghosts might moan in the desert places of a new world. Faith? Faith had faded with the streak of dawn. There was nothing in his mind but the old kaleidoscope of antic men and women. . . .

“Well — you been drunk, I callate.”

A man clothed in oil-skins was leaning over the side of the seiner. The dirty dory in which he stood bobbed up and down. Jack looked at him and laughed vacantly.

“I suppose so! Where am I?”

“Ashore on Big Hog Back, and if I hadn’t seen you from the light, I guess you’d been buried here.”

“Is that so?” Jack asked, trying to move his stiff limbs. “Give me a drink — I’m cold clear through.”

“I guess you had enough of *that* before you went to sea in that rig,” the man answered cautiously.

“Well, don’t give me a drink then,” Jack retorted glumly. “But take me ashore — whereabouts is your old sand-spit, anyway?”

BOOK III
MANHOOD

CHAPTER I

It was sultry even in Hodder and Kimball's offices on the thirteenth floor of the Nassau Street building. The senior member of the law firm had been out of town for the last month; the junior member was in Europe in search of rest. On this Saturday afternoon Jack Pemberton was alone in the office. The clerks, and the two other young lawyers associated with Hodder and Kimball, had fled to the seashore for a little respite from the heat of early September. Jack had moved his desk to the open window, in the hope of waylaying a stray puff of air. A long, typewritten manuscript lay on the desk before him. He pushed it to one side and took up a voluminous letter from Stevenson that he had already read. There was an unusual note of depression in it.

"It isn't any bonanza I'm urging you to take. To tell the truth, I want *you*, and I am afraid I am asking you to join us against your best interests. This panic has struck my father between wind and water. He had just about got matters where he wanted them, when the bad times came. Now it isn't a question of the road's paying anything to him and his friends, who own the stock. It's nip and tuck to pay the interest on the bonds and keep out of the courts. Between ourselves, the Iowa and Northern is in pretty bad shape. But if you like a

fight, we can accommodate you. . . . I may be East this winter, and I will explain what we are doing. . . . Little Black got that job at Iowa City. He's happy — ”

Jack laid the letter aside, and resumed his study of the typewritten document. That was concerned with the most considerable piece of business which he had yet had intrusted to him. Oddly enough, it had some slight connection with Stevenson ; for when the brokerage firm of Greenacre and Co. had assigned, certain bonds of the Iowa and Northern had appeared as a not inconsiderable item in the assets of the firm. At the time of Greenacre and Co.'s assignment, he had helped Mr. Kimball unravel the snarl of the firm's affairs.

He leaned back in his chair and summed up the history of the case. The man Greenacre had been connected with the old firm of Boston bankers, — Lord, Mather, & Greenacre. The methods of this reputable firm, whose sign had grown faded and rusty in the sixty years it had hung over the windows of their State Street offices, had cramped the ambitions of young Greenacre, nephew of General Mather's partner, and he had moved to New York in the eighties to find a larger field for his operations. There he had had an almost instant success, and when Ned Mather had finally removed himself from Harvard and chosen to live in New York, Greenacre had taken him into his office, thus allying himself more closely with the Boston banking house. Then, a few years later, Frank Mason had found a berth in the same office. In a very short time these two young men had become partners with Greenacre, at least in name. The

Cushing and the Mather interests furnished a certain solid reputation for the operations of the firm.

Then followed, as Jack knew thoroughly, the speculative career of the house of Greenacre and Co., which had closed in the office of Hodder and Kimball. When the smash came, the firm's affairs were so closely interwoven with family relationships that their settlement had resolved itself pretty largely into an adjustment between E. P. Cushing and General Mather. And, as Jack also knew, the Mathers had got the worst of it. General Mather had paid liberally for his son's business training, and in return had been forced to take these Iowa and Northern bonds for which there was no ready market, while E. P. Cushing had skilfully covered himself from any large loss before the assignment. The details of the transaction were embedded in the long typewritten manuscript, which Jack had helped to prepare.

He laid the document aside, and knitting his hands behind his head, allowed his mind to wander over the human questions suggested by the dull sheets. What had happened to the engagement between Frank Mason and Miss Mather? It had dragged on now for over six years, and even if it had survived the wreck of Greenacre and Co., and the Jew dealing of Cushing in the settlement, could it survive the latest manifestation of the young man's worthlessness? That was a recent development of the failure, and, as Kimball was in Europe, it had fallen upon Jack to take charge of it. It was partly on this account that he was to be found here in the sultry office on a September Saturday afternoon. Was there a

loophole of escape for young Mason, honorable, or even legally possible, without having recourse to his rich brother-in-law? After a weary day of investigation, during which he had reviewed the entire history of Greenacre and Co., he had come to the conclusion that there was none. Either Cushing must pay a considerable sum, or his brother-in-law must take the consequences of a criminal act. He hoped sincerely that Miss Mather had broken with the fellow, and would no longer suffer for him.

He smiled as he recalled the attitude of Ned Mather during the protracted investigation of Greenacre and Co.'s affairs. It had been almost impossible to find him, especially when the polo season opened; and when he was induced to attend the meetings in Hodder and Kimball's office, he showed an astounding ignorance of what his firm had been doing. His face wore the passive, sad expression of the renaissance portrait, accented by a sardonic droop to the mouth, and his bearing with the lawyers and creditors was haughty. The personal lesson he drew from the experience was an amusing one.

"I told the General," he confided to Jack on one of these occasions, "that he would save money by setting me up on a ranch. Roger is no star in business, but he's never cost the family what this will. The General probably agrees with me now; but he is an obstinate man. He can't surmount his prejudices in favor of hustling. He doesn't understand the inevitable growth of a leisure class in American society, but this will open his eyes, perhaps."

Mather had displayed unexpected flashes of shrewdness, also.

"Greenacre is a rascal," Mather told Kimball and Pemberton one afternoon, after a meeting during which he had apparently been asleep. "Mason was a tool, and I, a fool; but Greenacre was plain bad. When Cushing's steel business was incorporated, he and Cushing first got together. They are no saints!"

Jack and the older lawyer came to the same conclusion, and though the new development in the case, which involved Mason, shook his faith in the latter's innocence, he was inclined to suspend judgment. Ned Mather and the General were the only figures in the affair who had left an agreeable impression upon the young lawyer.

His connection with the case had been distasteful to him; but Kimball, whose health had already begun to break, had leaned on him more and more. The other young men in the office had envied him the preference which Kimball had shown, and had predicted for him a rapid rise in the office, especially when Kimball had gone abroad, leaving Jack in charge of much of his business. Yet, in spite of this fair prospect, Jack did not dismiss Stevenson's invitation lightly. The chance for a good fight, even a losing one, attracted him; still more, the vision of a new field, where men touched one another more intimately than in the routine practice of Hodder and Kimball's office. Stevenson and he had talked of this plan ever since their first year at the Law School, but something had always intervened to deter him from going West. Now it was Kimball's absence, as much as anything.

He wrote one or two letters, then closed his desk and left the silent building. There was nothing for him to do before dinner, and to waste the time he strolled up-town through the interminable thoroughfare of shops. The clatter of the city dulled his thoughts. He became a machine. At the proper time he would know that he was hungry, and satisfy his hunger. Then he would put himself upon his bed and in due time fall asleep. Tomorrow he would rise and return to the Nassau Street offices, and as problems arose in the course of the day he would solve them, — his mind putting forth a certain idea in response to a certain stimulus, as a machine lifts a long arm and then drops it. The next day, the same; and the next, and the next. This was life. . . .

He liked the down-town office buildings, the wholesale stores, and banks, even the roar of the drays and the turmoil of men in the heat of their affairs. All this sweat of life appealed to his machine nature. That was repeated, too, day by day, for all the years and the centuries: that made existence, as we know it, he said to himself.

He liked it less as the character of the thoroughfare changed, first about Fourteenth Street to large retail shops and the cheaper marts of feminine fashion, and then at Twenty-third Street, to more luxurious shops. Beyond Twenty-third Street, the city was given over to luxury, pleasure, ostentation. The play of man pleased him less than his work. They rushed up here — the fortunate ones — each day, as soon as they could escape from the sweat down below. And the sweat of the

machine-made work went on more fiercely as man struggled harder and harder to get up here. . . .

The business of the day came back to his mind in the shape of the persons concerned,—Ned Mather, the old General, Isabelle Mather, the Cushings, Stevenson. In the dead air of the city they seemed to move wearily, mechanically. The girl alone had animation,—the woman whose face he had seen flushed with joy and pride because she loved Frank Mason. Some day he should have to see Mason and tell him that he had been weak once too often. The girl had not married him; perhaps she had learned to know his nature before this. So much the better! . . . Now it was time to dine.

CHAPTER II

"HELLO, Jack, if it is Jack!"

Pemberton looked suspiciously at the woman who accosted him at the exit of a Broadway theatre.

"Well, what is it?" he asked cautiously.

"Go long, you know me—Stella? I was with your brother up Harlem way. Remember?"

"Perfectly," Jack replied, with a slight increase of animation. "How have you been?"

"Up and down—mostly down, I guess."

She seemed anxious to detain him, and Jack suggested that they walk on. He was aware that people were looking at them; three years of New York had taught him to read this form of curiosity.

"Have you seen Steve lately?" Stella asked, pulling a small cape about her shoulders and assuming her theatrical stride.

"Not for about a year. He left New York, you know. Got a place in Cleveland. He doesn't write often."

"You didn't know, then, that he is in trouble?"

"No," Jack answered slowly, looking at Stella with fresh suspicion. "He usually lets me know on such occasions."

The last one had cost him two hundred dollars.

"He's been pulled — last Monday, and I guess it's awful bad."

They were passing a small restaurant, and Jack, who foresaw that the tale might be a long one, invited Stella to have supper with him. She followed him rather timidly, and ordered her supper with an interested, but subdued, air. She had grown stout, and her face was slightly flabby. The plain black skirt and soiled silk waist had the air of being sole possessions. The straw hat, in spite of some new velvet, was shabby. She took this off, as if conscious of its defects, and, having patted her hair, looked dumbly across the table at Jack.

"How did you learn this?" Jack asked.

"He came to my room when he brought up in New York. I'm living with Liddy over on Sixth Avenue. We've been there —"

"So Steve is in New York?" Jack interrupted.

"Yes."

"How long?"

"Most a month, I guess, before they tracked him."

"Who tracked him?"

"The detectives."

Jack ceased questioning the woman, who grew more timid, and ate furtively with an awkward display of her good manners. He hesitated before probing farther, a sickening feeling of impending misfortune tempting him to put the woman off, to escape the unpleasant truth as long as he could. Finally, as Stella ceased to eat and looked at him expectantly, he said: —

"Well, what of it?"

"Steve told me to see you as soon as I could—he thought maybe you could do something. But I lost the address, and I was waiting for a chance to see him again —"

She rambled on disconnectedly, while Jack thought.

"What *was* it?" he asked finally.

"I don't just know," Stella replied, dropping her eyes. "Money, I guess—he took some—he'd a long talk about it—but I guess that's it. It's generally that with Steve."

"Yes, it's generally that with Steve," Jack repeated. "How much?"

"A lot—more than ever before," Stella admitted slowly.

Jack laughed.

"You will do something?" Stella asked anxiously.

"What do you care whether I do or not?" Jack asked roughly.

"Of course I care," Stella cried, bridling, and for the first time showing confidence. "Steve's been hard on me, left me when I was in trouble, but I don't want him to go to prison. Do you want your brother in the penitentiary?"

Jack moved nervously at the woman's plain words. Seeing her advantage, Stella pushed on.

"Steve's foolish,—foolisher than most. He always will have a good time whether he's got the stuff or not; but he is generous and freehanded when he's got anything. He's his own worst enemy!" she proclaimed finally, as a convincing argument. "I often said to him, 'You're nobody's enemy, Steve, but your own!'"

Her plea had little apparent effect upon Jack, who played absently with the forks and spoons on the table. Stella exclaimed:—

“You won’t let your brother go to prison!”

“I don’t know what I shall do,” Jack answered irritably, rising from the table. Stella hastily put on her hat and followed him closely into the street. She seemed determined not to let him escape without some promise.

“What’s he done for you?” Jack asked abruptly, when they had reached the sidewalk.

Stella reddened and did not answer. Jack continued brusquely:—

“What did he do when your child came?”

“He couldn’t do much,—his pay was all tied up,—but he sent me a little money now and then, when he had anything, and he used to bring the baby beautiful presents. Steve’s generous. Nobody can say Steve ain’t generous.”

She clung to her idea of Steve’s magnanimity, estimating, in feminine fashion, good-will as a large part of generosity.

“Very generous!” Jack repeated ironically. “He left you and went to Cleveland. Did he send you anything?”

“You know he couldn’t stay here! He was pestered with debts, couldn’t walk out on the streets, and the folks he owed money to bothered his firm. What could he do? Steve ain’t as successful as some men who look after themselves mighty well!” she concluded suspiciously.

"Where's your child?"

"Up country with Liddy's folks."

"Do you ever want to see it?"

"I had it back last fall for a time, but I couldn't do nothing with it," she explained heavily.

"My dear Stella," Jack resumed, after they had walked a block in silence, "Steve is absolutely worthless. He is one of the weakest and most selfish men you have ever seen. It's the luckiest thing that ever happened to you that he hadn't the decency to marry you. Now, I advise you to shake him once for all, and do the best you can with the child. He will never do anything for it or for you, — and he will always think he is doing something, or that the world is so hard on him he's never had a chance. Take my advice, and thank God he's locked up where he can't trouble *you*."

"So you're going to let your brother go to prison!" Stella retorted sullenly. "You're a nice one!"

"I don't know what I am going to do," Jack said wearily. "I shan't know to-night, so you had better let me see you home."

They walked another block, and then Stella said timidly, "I guess you needn't trouble to come along any further; I've got an errand —"

The late passers-by turned their heads, stared curiously at the two, and then hurried on. Jack buttoned up his overcoat.

"Good night, Stella. Remember what I said about Steve. It's true — dead true, every word."

"Mayn't I come to see you to-morrow?" she asked.

"Maybe you'll feel different. I'll go to your office any time you say, and then I can see Steve and make him easy."

"Not at the office," Jack replied; "I'll meet you where we had supper, after the theatre."

Stella started up the cross-street. Jack watched her for a block, and then strolled on to his boarding-house.

The next morning he had not made up his mind whether he should pay any attention to Stella's tale or not. During the forenoon, however, he was forced to make some decision. An emissary from Steve, in the form of one of the scavengers who haunt criminal courts, called upon him. He was young, bald, sallow, and dirty. He laid his card upon Jack's desk with a flourish. It read, *G. Linepecker*.

"I have been requested by my client, Mr. Pemberton, to confer with you."

Jack eyed the cheap little lawyer, and asked, "How much is it this time, Mr. Linepecker?"

The criminal lawyer, understanding the professional competency of his client's brother, replied without hesitation:—

"Thirty-two hundred and fifty-six dollars on the original draft, and court expenses, fees, incidentals, you understand." He waved his hand vaguely.

"Say thirty-seven hundred," Jack suggested, with a smile. "And the charge?"

"Embezzlement."

The little lawyer looked at the other young man, and

then glanced about the well-appointed office. After allowing Jack a decent time for reflection, he added: —

“They expect to get the requisition papers to-morrow.”

“Very well, Mr. Linepecker. You may tell your client I will see him this noon. Good morning.”

And the little lawyer, who had planned a more complex method of arrangement, found himself in the outer office.

The talk between the two brothers was brief. Jack's one object was to find out all the facts, and Steve, who was in a very nervous condition, was only too eager to tell his story. He had been given the draft by the treasurer of the company, in a somewhat irregular fashion, — Jack surmised that it was for purposes which could not conveniently appear on the books of the company, — and had cashed it, while drunk. When, after a few days, he had found himself in New York, he possessed neither draft nor money. Then, foolishly, he had gone into hiding at Stella's rooms.

“But if they try to push me into prison, I'll make it hot for 'em. I'll tell what they drew the draft for. I'll make a stink —”

Jack waved his hand in cool disgust.

“Have they an office here?” he asked.

Having found out that the President and General Manager of the Celina Iron Works had his office in New York, Jack next went to find him. On the door of the suite of offices had been painted in large letters above The Celina Wire Works, THE CUSHING STEEL WORKS COMPANY. The name recalled to Jack's mind a detail

of the Greenacre failure, in which E. P. Cushing was also interested.

The manager, to whom Jack explained his errand, seemed anxious "to arrange the matter," as he phrased it. Pemberton was a very able business man, he said, valuable to his company, and they had done what they could for him in New York, until his habits had become too bad to endure. Then they had started him afresh at the Cleveland agency, in hopes that he would sober down. But this matter of the draft was too serious to pass over; moreover, he could not if he would, for he was responsible to the Cushing Company board of directors. In reply to Jack's question, he admitted that if the money were returned, legal action would be stopped; indeed, if a considerable portion of the money were returned, they would not press the matter, Pemberton's long connection with the business being taken into consideration, their dislike of publicity, etc., etc. There ensued a long pause, which Jack broke.

"May I ask what is the amount you would accept?"

The manager looked the young man over keenly.

"You are a lawyer?"

Jack nodded.

"On a salary, I suppose?"

Jack nodded again.

"Suppose we say one half?" he suggested blithely.

Instead of replying directly, Jack asked:—

"There were circumstances connected with the use of this money that make it convenient for your company to have the matter dropped?"

This opened a long discussion, during which Jack found that the company had other charges against Steve of misappropriation of money.

"You needn't think you've got a club," the manager concluded roughly. "I've given your brother good terms, and I'll let you have two days to make up your mind."

"If we settle the matter," Jack replied curtly, "it will be for the *entire* amount. I don't care to take your terms. As for the other charges, you know well enough that they won't stand in law, and I doubt if ethically they're sound. Your company knew what my brother was doing with some of that money, junketing firms and individuals you hoped to get orders from. You kept him on because he was a good man to do that kind of thing. People like to paint the town with him, and he knows how to fix men without offending them. So far as your company is concerned, I don't give a damn whether you lose the money or not, or rather I should like to see you lose that and a lot more. It comes down to the question whether I want to see my brother in prison or not."

"Just that!" the manager assented, with a shrug for Jack's opinion of his company's methods.

"And I have forty-eight hours?"

"That's what I said."

When he left the manager's office, Jack was no nearer a solution of the question than before. During the afternoon, while he was busy in his office, his mind reverted to Steve's case; and he carried it, still unsolved, to his lonely dinner at a restaurant. Should he pay? Could

he pay? He could get the money. His firm would advance him something, Stevenson would lend him some more, and he had a few hundreds of dollars in the bank. It would be placing a very large mortgage on his life, one that would weight him heavily just now, when he needed every sinew for the mad struggle in New York. Moreover, it would make it impossible for him to do what he planned for Mary, for his mother, who were more or less discontented in their position at Coffin's Falls. Of course he knew what their wish would be — anything to save Steve, to save the family disgrace.

He came to this theme with his coffee, and pondered while he sipped it and watched the people around him. As a lawyer he had reason to know what strength, as a human motive, this desire to avoid disgrace had with people in his position. It kept two adulterous people in the bonds of matrimony; it drove a young girl to fulfil the void engagement of her heart, made in ignorance and trust; it forced the old to beggar themselves and their dependents for the sake of avoiding public comment upon a worthless child. His judgment resented the folly of it; his heart hated the hypocrisy of it. In this queer world of shadows, of wooden dummies, of empty cries, of shadowy desires and hopes and fears, it seemed to him some daylight might shine, should people be but honest to themselves, to others. And his profession was concerned very largely with the dishonest compromises men make to avoid disgrace.

Clearly, as he judged himself, as he judged the world, Steve ought to take the penalty of his weak acts. If

there were such a thing as responsibility, if there were any law in this whirligig of illusion, man must pay for his acts, and pay what society demanded. Why should one escape and another pay? He need but glance at the evening paper to read the names of those who paid. And he had been spending his day in seeking means by which one favored individual could escape from the consequences of his dishonor. No! that was the injustice that would wreck the present kind of civilization which man gloried in; that was the injustice that made life insane, incomprehensible.

Instead of going to the theatre, as he had intended, he strolled about the streets, thinking, — thinking vaguely and comprehensively, — as he could think best within sound of the human roar of the city, within touch of the passing multitude. If Steve went to prison, within forty-eight hours every man or woman he knew would have a chance to know the fact and to say his say about him. To a young man, no matter how well he might stand with his neighbors, this was not only unpleasant, but harmful. Yet the thought of it merely strayed through his mind, and was dismissed contemptuously. He had lived through worse things than scandal! They might say their say, and he would outlive their chatter.

His mother and sister, his uncle and aunt, would suffer. Where was his affection, they would cry, accusingly, — he, the only strong one, to let the weak go down without stretching out his hand? Had he any affection? Not much, it must be confessed. He was not a person of easy affections, and he did not admit conventional claims. His

life had been solitary, and he had not got the habit of easily flaming sympathy. He had never liked to be with Steve for any considerable length of time, and he had a thorough contempt for his way of life. Indeed, he had more affection for Stella—that weak and faded soul—little as he had seen her, than he had ever had for Steve. So, if he stretched out the hand, it would be in pity for Stella, for his mother and sister, for all the weak ones, who would weep their weak and futile tears. . . .

He must decide before he saw Stella at the restaurant, and he *would* decide, not let himself be pushed by some impulse this way or that. And that decision came, little by little, as he tramped the crowded streets, the hard lines of determination forming themselves from the floating impressions, the vague feelings for right and justice and order, that make the nebulous world in which man lives, and as they shaped themselves, he felt a certain conscious relief and calm.

He would not interfere.

Stella was waiting at the corner, studying the display of lobsters and game in the window of the restaurant. The pheasants, the empty champagne bottles, the big red shellfish, had a certain symbolical significance to her: she was reflecting.

Jack, who had noticed her interest in the window, ordered the best supper he could think of, and while they waited, they talked about the theatres, especially about a new ballet that was being imported from London at great expense. When the supper came, Stella devoted herself

to her fish and game. Finally, when she had satisfied the first relish of her appetite, she looked across the table at Jack.

"You've seen Steve?"

"Yes."

"Is it very bad?"

He nodded.

"No way out?"

"One way — they'll let him off if a part of the money is paid back."

Stella's eyes fell. She knew that it was a large sum.

"Can you raise it?" she asked at length.

"I might," Jack answered, and she waited, her lips open in eager anticipation.

"But," he said slowly, "I shan't try. Steve's got to take his punishment this time."

Stella began to eat, mechanically, with little appetite.

"So, he's got to go to prison?" she asked, and then, with rising voice, "So you're going to let him go to prison! You're a nice brother, you are."

The people at the next table looked at the two with interest, but Jack was too much absorbed to notice them. He tried to calm the woman, to give her his reasons in the simplest form, and she listened truculently.

"I had rather do what I can for you, and Steve's child," he concluded. "I can do a little of Steve's work for him, and later, when he's had his lesson, perhaps he'll try to be a little more of a man and do it himself."

"I don't want your dirty money," Stella cried. "I wish I had the ten dollars you gave me yesterday. I'd

rather —” But a threatening look from Jack calmed her, and she contented herself with tears, ineffectively mopping her eyes with her handkerchief.

“As you like,” Jack answered impatiently. “You must take it for the baby, anyway. But we’ll see about that later. Perhaps you’ll feel differently then.”

“I’ll never feel any different,” she shot out angrily. “I ain’t a cold-blooded brute, who’ll see his own family in trouble, and talk and talk, and reason up and down hill. I have some feelings. Steve has some feelings, too. He wouldn’t let a friend, let alone a brother, go to prison if he could help it.”

“The trouble is he can never help anything,” Jack interposed wearily.

“Well, I’ll stick to him, if he is down,” she ended, and pushed back her chair. “I don’t want nothing more. Nor of you, either. Steve’s got a few friends, and I guess I’ll see if some folks haven’t more heart than a brother.”

She flitted up the street, tossing the last taunt over her shoulder.

CHAPTER III

JACK folded the newspaper and laid it to one side. The announcement of Steve's embezzlement and arrest was very brief; more important affairs in the great metropolis rendered this petty crime insignificant to the city editors. The five-line paragraph was salient enough, however, to penetrate to every town in the United States where the Pemberton name was known. It was a record, in a way more inexpugnable than the verdict of the court.

Jack had spent the evening before with his sister, who had come from Coffin's Falls for the one purpose of inducing him to raise the necessary money and release Steve. Previously he had spent a bitter hour with Steve. They had not shaken his resolution; but their entreaties, their reproaches, their distress, haunted him. When he had read the newspaper paragraph this morning, he had gone over the stony road of his resolution once more, and although he had come to the same conclusion, his mind was dull and sore.

Late in the morning Mr. Hodder sent for Jack. In the private office of the senior member of the firm were General Mather and his daughter. Jack bowed to the latter, and Mr. Hodder remarked:—

“General Mather, Mr. Pemberton. Mr. Pemberton

knows more than I do of this affair. He will be able to answer your questions. I am sorry Mr. Kimball is out of the country. But you can trust Mr. Pemberton's discretion and ability."

After this introduction there was a pause, and Jack looked at General Mather with some curiosity. General Mather was tall and lean, almost gaunt, and his thin shoulders had begun to bend. The white flesh of his face was sparsely covered with a snow-white beard. Even in the warm office he kept his long overcoat tightly buttoned, and his long, thin hands trembled as from cold or the palsy of age. His blue eyes, steel-blue like his daughter's, gleamed from the sunken sockets with remarkable power. He was old and frail and wasted, but he was as shrewd as ever. When he spoke, his tones were as cold as his eyes. He seemed indifferent, if not annoyed, and Jack could feel that he disliked to deal with a young man.

"Can you tell General Mather what this new complication is which retards the final settlement of the Green-acre case?" the older lawyer asked. "I have not looked into the matter since my return."

"Mr. Kimball, before his departure, arranged a basis of settlement with the various interests that was apparently satisfactory," Jack began, rather nervously.

General Mather nodded, and said gruffly:—

"I supposed that ended it. It was bad enough! But my daughter heard from Mrs. Cushing that there was a sequel. Just what is it?"

"There was only one point left in abeyance at the

time of settlement," Jack continued slowly, following the old man's eyes, "and that, it was supposed, would be privately settled by the parties especially interested."

"Young Mason's share," General Mather filled in grimly.

Jack nodded, and hesitated in embarrassment. The tall young woman, who had sat motionless all this time, leaned forward, and Jack could feel her intense expectancy.

"Only yesterday," Jack continued, searching for periphrases, "I had a letter from Mr. Cushing, which makes it clear that the expected arrangement will not be possible."

Mr. Hodder at this point excused himself and left the office. Then the others breathed more easily.

"I understand you to mean that Cushing refuses to pull his brother-in-law out of prison," General Mather observed clearly.

Miss Mather's lips trembled. She was on the point of asking a question, and finally she summoned her courage:—

"Where is he, Mr. Pemberton?"

Jack, who looked at her closely for the first time, answered gently:—

"His friends have thought best to have him out of the way until the matter could be adjusted."

"Oh!" the woman exclaimed. And then, summoning her courage again, she asked with an evident effort: "You mean that he could not,—it would not be safe?"

"He would probably be arrested, if he appeared in New York," Jack explained firmly.

"And if—if Mr. Cushing refuses; if the thing can't be settled —"

"He could never come back here," Jack completed, with the same directness.

General Mather, who had risen and walked to the bookcases, turned and shot a cold glance at his daughter.

"I told you, Isabelle! He is a thorough rascal. You can speak openly, Mr. Pemberton. I wish my daughter to know the whole thing — the whole thing."

He took his seat again, and there was a period of silence before Miss Mather spoke. She looked at Jack, with the pain of her broken pride written plainly on her face. "Yes, I want to know just what it was. You need not consider my feelings, Mr. Pemberton."

Her manner appealed to Jack. He liked her directness, her simplicity, her mastered pride; and he resolved to do exactly what she asked, hurt as it might.

"Briefly," he said, "the story is this. When Mr. Kimball went into the affairs of the firm, he found them badly involved. That is a polite word for very tricky bookkeeping. There were several sets of books, and in the end we suspect that Mr. Greenacre had another set — which would be more enlightening if we could come at it — which he kept in his head. It took the accountants several weeks to get any idea of the conditions, and new liabilities were constantly turning up. In short, the firm had engaged in every kind of enterprise, and had done things not countenanced by conservative, or, we may

say, honest, business. Greenacre was a bad lot, in short."

Miss Mather followed every word, studying Jack's face as if to read there more than he said. At his characterization of Greenacre, the General smiled faintly.

"At the very end," Jack continued, "when we thought we had straightened the tangle out, we found that certain securities belonging to a customer had disappeared."

Miss Mather nodded impatiently.

"Later those securities were traced; they had been negotiated."

"He had taken them?" Miss Mather said, in vague question.

"That I do not say," Jack hastened to reply. "The circumstance was peculiar. It seems that two days before the assignment an old customer of the firm brought in some bonds, which were to be used as collateral for a loan the customer desired to make. Although the firm was then in trouble, and we have reason to believe that Mr. Mason knew it would suspend, he received the bonds."

Miss Mather sighed, and Jack hastened to add:—

"There was nothing exceptional in that part of the story. It was late when the bonds were delivered, personally, into Mr. Mason's hands; and though the safe was closed at the time, he received them, and gave the firm's receipt."

Jack paused a moment, and then continued:—

"The bonds were never deposited in the safe; they disappeared. Greenacre claims that he never saw them.

At all events, in the eyes of the law Mason is the responsible person, and he has not attempted to deny his responsibility. I believe, myself," he added hastily, "that Greenacre's connection with this part of the affair will never be known. However, as it stands, those securities must be replaced, every dollar, or —"

He waited, but as neither the General nor Miss Mather spoke, he explained : —

"You see, they were not assets of the firm ; they were private funds deposited in their charge. Just as if I gave your father my purse to keep while I —"

Miss Mather stopped him with a sudden gesture. She understood. As the story was finished, General Mather observed in his dry, distant manner : —

"You have stated the facts very well, Mr. Pemberton. My daughter insisted on coming here, although I could have told her the sum of what you have said. I think we need not take your time further, Mr. Pemberton."

Jack rose quickly to leave, but Miss Mather detained him.

"You say that Mr. Cushing refuses?" she asked.

"He will do nothing; he leaves it to his wife; and I suppose that Mrs. Cushing will hardly be able to pay the amount without her husband's help."

"It is a very large sum?" she asked timidly.

"Oh! I don't remember exactly — about forty-five thousand dollars, possibly a few thousand more — under fifty."

"Elsie never could pay it," Miss Mather remarked.

Suddenly she turned to her father, and asked him to wait for her in the next room.

"I want to ask Mr. Pemberton some questions," she explained briefly.

"Certainly," the General assented, as if tired of the whole affair.

When Jack returned from showing the General to his own office, Miss Mather was standing with her back to him. When she turned, she made no attempt to hide her tears. Jack pushed forward a chair and waited.

"You think he really stole?" she asked at last. "I mean that he knew *what* he was doing."

"Yes, I think we must assume that a man of his years knew that he was doing something illegal when he hypothecated the securities. I suspect that Greenacre connived at it, perhaps encouraged it; that we shall never know. Greenacre is a clever rascal. But no matter what Greenacre's share may have been, the fact remains that Mr. Mason first received the bonds and, I fear, never deposited them in the safe. He must have known enough business to realize what he was doing. Why, a child would have known that!"

"You do not give him the advantage of a single doubt! You condemn him unheard. I want to hear his defence," she protested, with spirit.

"Why isn't he here, then?" Jack suggested quietly. "Why hasn't he made at least an intelligible statement of his acts, instead of leaving it to his friends to compromise or settle as best they can?"

The last shadow of hope faded from Miss Mather's face. Jack sat waiting, sincerely miserable for her.

"Thank you," she said. "You are right. It is good to know all, the whole wretched story."

After another pause she asked: —

"And he must go to prison?"

"Not necessarily. He won't come back until it's patched up, I suppose."

"You haven't any sympathy with patching it up?" she demanded quickly.

Jack shook his head.

"A lot of harm is done that way," he answered, firmly convinced about this point from recent experience.

"But why shouldn't he have another chance?" the woman protested.

"To swindle some one else? No, not necessarily that. But why shouldn't the others, — the thousands and thousands who can't make 'settlements' and 'compromises' and 'arrangements'; who haven't rich and influential relatives and friends that are afraid of the disgrace, — why shouldn't they escape their sins, too?"

The heat of his words breathed an animus, a hatred of privilege, of class.

"You would let Frank go to prison just because the next sinner had to go?" she asked reproachfully.

"It isn't my place to judge this case, Miss Mather," Jack responded, after a time. "I shall do what I can to make a settlement. I have already begun negotiations with the parties interested to get their consent to accept less than the full amount, — say thirty thousand dollars, or even twenty-five, — and I shall write Mrs. Cushing when I have heard from them. If you ask my private opinion,

I must say frankly that I don't like this business, — this compromising."

"I mustn't take more of your time," she said, rising. "You have been really kind."

"I wish I could *do* something!" the young lawyer exclaimed. The woman's suffering, the old appeal that always touched his heart, made him miserable. He regretted his plain words, and he added gently: "I know what it is to you. No one can help you."

"No," she said, with a little smile of gratitude for his sympathy. "No one can help me. It is worse than you know, — than a man can know."

"Yes," he assented.

"I do not want you to believe that I — I — love him as you think," she added hastily, with a burst of frankness, a need for telling the exact truth of her heart. "After these years, after knowing all, that would be impossible, — the romance, I mean, the looking up, which is so much to a woman. But I want to save him!" she ended, with a sudden cry, "to save him from himself. Poor Frank!"

Her face was no longer cold, indifferent, as he had always thought it. The years that she had suffered had broken her little reserves, her little pride, and she was neither conscious nor ashamed in revealing her intimate pain. When she spoke of her present feeling for Frank, Jack's heart responded with sympathy and admiration. He remembered the afternoon at Riverside, when he had come upon her and Mason in the little pavilion, surprising her in the first flush of her love. Between that face and this one there had been painful years, honestly and

bravely lived, with a steadfast purpose. The fineness of race, which she had from her father, united with a fineness of spirit, which was her own.

"I will do my utmost to save him," Jack responded warmly, in his desire to comfort her. "Mrs. Cushing can't let this — this scandal happen."

"I didn't mean that," Miss Mather answered quickly. "But yes, he must be freed from the disgrace, too. You see a woman, Mr. Pemberton, can't take your stern view of it, especially when the woman has loved."

"Well, I shall make every effort. I will write Mrs. Cushing to-day," he said warmly.

"Do you see Elsie?" Miss Mather asked.

"Occasionally," the young lawyer answered in a matter-of-fact voice. "She has been abroad a great deal these last years."

"She is pleasure-loving, like him," Miss Mather mused.

"Yes," he replied, "but she is stronger than he is."

"Or hasn't been put to the proof."

"That we cannot say," he responded gently.

There was nothing further to be said, and he waited for her to take leave. But she had something on her mind which caused her to linger, trying to overcome her shyness.

"You haven't been at the Neck for a long while," she observed.

"I have not taken a vacation since I came to New York."

"Mrs. Betts, — you remember her? — died winter before last."

"My aunt wrote me."

"He married again last year, a woman from Rockland."

She was thinking probably of his promise to the sick woman. He had not forgotten it, but he refused to be drawn out. This meeting was essentially a business matter, and he never made concessions to the social sides of his profession. As they shook hands, Miss Mather asked him to call upon her while she was in New York, and he promised to do so.

"I will bring you news very soon."

In the other office Mr. Hodder was telling General Mather some story. But the General rose with alacrity at sight of his daughter, and bowing to Jack, shook hands formally with the older lawyer and left. As Jack sat down at his desk, he noticed that the morning paper had been unfolded and laid aside. He wondered how carefully General Mather had read the page that was opened before him.

"Curious old swell," Mr. Hodder remarked to the younger lawyer, looking at his watch. "You handled that very well, Pemberton. I thought we should have a scene. I gather that he brought his daughter here to let her hear the worst, and he is not sorry to have the relationship broken. I don't believe the Mathers fancied the least bit her marrying Mason."

"No, I guess not," Jack assented.

"An American *mésalliance*," Mr. Hodder summed up neatly. "Won't you lunch with me at the Union?"

As the two men left the office, Mr. Hodder remarked casually :—

"I see by the paper that some one of your name has been getting into trouble."

"My brother," Jack answered steadily.

The older lawyer took Jack's arm as they crossed the hall to the elevator.

"I'm sorry, my boy," he said simply.

CHAPTER IV

As Jack had told Miss Mather, he had seen Elsie occasionally. The first months of his life in New York he had been afraid of meeting her, and yet whenever he was where she might possibly be found he had looked for her with a furtive desire to see her, to hear from her. But New York, especially for an utterly unknown young man who spends his days on the thirteenth floor of a Nassau Street building and his nights in an Irving Place boarding-house, is a continent in itself. The few times he had met Frank Mason or Ned Mather, the only men he knew who were likely to see Elsie, he had heard nothing of her. His other friends were young men like himself, very near the bottom of the ladder, — some reporting for the newspapers, one engaged in the routine of magazine editing, others nursing their infant practice in the newer sections of the great city, still more with tiny homes far out on some of the innumerable suburban radii. They met at their college club, or at luncheon down town, or at the theatre. None of them had opportunities of knowing Mrs. Cushing.

So, what little he knew about her came from the newspapers, to whom she was only of minor importance, her movements to be recorded in a dearth of more prominent names. The house on Madison Avenue was fre-

quently closed for long periods. Sometimes the name of Mr. Cushing's steam yacht appeared in the papers as entering or leaving a foreign port, but Mrs. Cushing was not always on board. They had a place in the country on Long Island, as well as the Pemberton Neck house. And Elsie flitted about in the fitful manner of the impermanent rich, whose numbers, ever increasing, gradually form a little world for themselves, — one that exists side by side with the more stable world, yet rarely touches it. Once, his second year in New York, he had met Elsie at the Kimball's. It was a large dinner-party, and he had merely touched hands with her. A few weeks afterward she had asked him to dinner, and after much wavering in his mind he had declined. Then he had met her coming out of a picture dealer's on Fifth Avenue, and she had made him stop and chat. He had promised to call and had done so, much later, only to find the house closed for the season. Lately she had come to the office to see Mr. Kimball, who was her lawyer, and he had exchanged a word with her while she waited for the lawyer. But they were strangers, — acquaintances who had once been friends, — and he always wished that they might not meet, neither he nor Elsie being expert in conducting a conversation on indifferent topics. She changed very slightly, keeping marvellously the fresh tints, the bloom of a child, which she had always had. Her manner, in spite of occasional bursts of frankness, was much more composed. Outwardly, at least, she had found that self-mastery which she had lacked all the early years of their acquaintance. Probably, he thought, she had made her compromise, her

arrangement with her life, and had sufficient wit and purpose to stick to it. She had always been keen, teachable; and she had doubtless learned how far she could go and on the whole keep where she wanted to be, — a kind of worldly wisdom that Jack had had no opportunity to value properly.

Yet all these three years, while he was toiling in his lonely fashion, with the underlying conviction that he touched wood, not human flesh; that he played a dull game, such as *solitaire*, as did others, but did not live, — the woman haunted his mind! Not the present, competent Mrs. Cushing, who was like a hundred other figures to be passed on the Avenue every bright afternoon, but the girl he had known in her first joyous experiments; the girl of ambitions, who had given him the first impulse to make a world for himself, to follow her. He had told her, boyishly, that he should always love her! And those boyish words, now that he no longer wished to think of her, seemed a prophecy from which he could not escape.

Instead of replying to his letter about her brother's affair, Mrs. Cushing came to the office, as Jack had half expected she would do. The difficulties in which she found herself solely preoccupied her. She talked quite openly and without sentiment. Jack soon saw that, from a totally different reason, there was as little need for euphemism with Mrs. Cushing as with Miss Mather.

"It's a nasty mess all around," Mrs. Cushing said at once, "and peculiarly like Frank, — just feeble and

cat's-pawish, — the child that's always getting into the puddle. What makes it worse is, that the bonds belonged to just those people of all others. They hate me, and they're talking. That can't be helped. Thank heavens, it takes a lot of talk to hurt me!"

"They will be content with twenty-five thousand, and I think I can stop their mouths, somewhat," Jack answered, adjusting his point of view exactly to that of his client. Mrs. Cushing was familiar with these irregularities in the world in which she moved. Every family had its black sheep, and the stone of gossip was scarcely a safe one to raise. Instead of shrinking from the compromise suggested, she asked shrewdly: —

"Is that the best that can be done?"

"The very best," Jack answered, with a smile. "They have a strong case, you know, Mrs. Cushing."

"What could they do?" she asked, looking at the lawyer keenly.

"They *could*, and undoubtedly *might*, discover his hiding-place, and have him brought back. Then they *would* put him in prison."

"It's the firm!" Mrs. Cushing cried. "Why aren't Greenacre and young Mather in it, too?"

"I tried to explain in my first letter why your brother is solely involved," Jack answered coolly. "General Mather has had to pay heavily for his son's share in the failure, but he has escaped without disgrace."

"Frank is such a fool!" Mrs. Cushing reflected. "He had everything made easy for him, and engaged to Isabelle Mather, too, — nice girl, if she is slow and

old-maidish. Men are such fools—they go and do something that makes a nasty row!”

Jack listened with a certain amusement to this explosion of irritation.

“But I can’t get all that money—I can’t possibly,” she concluded, as if some extortion were being practised upon her. “Mr. Cushing won’t hear Frank’s name without foaming. Besides, he’s going to Japan. You know we have an arrangement, and I can’t get one cent more. I’ve overdrawn already, and High Head, which he made over to me, is mortgaged to the chimneys. You must write them that it can’t be done—twenty-five thousand is too much!”

“To return fifty per cent of stolen property isn’t usually regarded as hard terms,” Jack observed dryly. “You will let the affair take its course, then?”

“Have Frank brought back here! Everything in the papers—and the trial! Why, I might just as well move out of New York for good; and I am sick of Europe.”

Jack made no suggestion.

“I wish Mr. Kimball were here!” Mrs. Cushing exclaimed in despair. “There must be some way out of it!”

“If you would like to see Mr. Hodder,” Jack replied, rising quickly. “You must know, Mrs. Cushing, how disagreeable my connection with the case has been to me. It came to me through Mr. Kimball’s illness, and I saw no way to avoid it. Believe me, I have done the very best I can for your brother.”

“Of course! Don’t take it so personally, Jack—Mr.

Pemberton. Only there are always ways out of these scrapes. Mr. Kimball knows the world."

"As I do not," Jack admitted dryly. "But I know the law, and I know that in this case there is *no way out*, unless you are willing to pay."

"But I can't. I couldn't sell every jewel I possess for half that sum. There are my pictures and the old tapestries, — but one can't sell such things at an hour's notice."

"The bank —"

Mrs. Cushing waved her hand in despair.

"And what shall we do with him afterwards? He can't come back here! There will be talk. Besides, he'll get into a new mess in six months."

"There's always the West," Jack suggested. "Besides, we have Porto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. I should recommend the Philippines; it's a long way off, and the army officers are the only ones that get into trouble out there."

"That might be possible," Mrs. Cushing agreed, ignoring the irony of the advice.

"Well, I will go and see what I can raise," she concluded, with a sigh. "Perhaps Zufeldt will give me something on my pictures. You haven't seen my pictures?" she added, glad to slip to another subject. "I have the best Maufras in America, and some very good Monets and Fragonards. Why don't you ever come to see me?"

Jack's color rose, and he moved awkwardly in his chair.

"You see, I have really good things, — all the men who know, say so, — and my collection is worth a good deal more than I paid for it. You must come and see it, and the house. I've had it almost all done over. It was such a fright! I hadn't any taste when I was married. I don't see how we lived in it. When will you come?"

"Whenever you say," Jack answered, before he knew what he was saying.

"Come Sunday, to luncheon," she appointed, after meditating; "and by that time I shall know what I can do. You can put them off until Sunday, can't you? That's only four days. If they are going to get all that money —"

"I will manage to put them off," Jack interrupted shortly.

"Very well; Sunday, at two."

She gave his hand a warm pressure, and smiled.

"It's so good to see you again, Mr. Pemberton," — she drawled the name, — "even on this dreary occasion."

CHAPTER V

MRS. CUSHING had certainly developed in taste since the time when she had been content with "effects" obtained by old candlesticks and pieces of faded brocade. Her means, perhaps, had permitted then no further display of æstheticism, but it took some years, after the enlargement of her means by marriage, before she learned to distinguish between the numerous Louis, and knew that Bouguereau, her girlhood's idol, was impossible, and that copies of old masters were only bought by certain classes of Americans. Her renaissance in art, however, when it did set in, came very fast. A young American sculptor, whom she had known in his productive years before his work had a market value, had introduced her to some real artists. They liked her dinners; they liked still better her reckless talk and vivid wilfulness. She reminded them of the happy boulevards of their youth, where one said what one pleased, provided it was witty. So they taught her the superficial small talk of art, and amused themselves with making of her a connoisseur. Her house was an agreeable one, and when she had money she bought generously of their goods. In the bottom of their hearts the serious men,—those who painted, or wrote, or thought,—despised her knowledge of art, but liked to flirt and talk French with their amusing hostess.

To them she was but another form of American glibness and pretension, not as dull or as vulgar as the merely rich. She bought what they told her to; she said picturesquely what they said soberly. And because men who had won some renown loafed at her house and called her by her first name, she felt that she had made a niche for herself in society, and was distinguished from the hundreds of people who left cards at her door. These people, who aspired for some similar kind of distinction from the other hundreds, also felt that she had arrived. They called her "eccentric," "artistic," "intellectual," or "bohemian," according to their respective vocabularies. And those who preferred polo, or yachting, or gambling, as did her husband, thought her house dull, and the company one met there rather common.

Jack was ignorant of Mrs. Cushing's renaissance in taste, and when he found himself the following Sunday in a reception room scrupulously Empire in style, he was not keenly aware of the contrast it presented to the rooms in the "double-decker" above the Park. He had had several minds about keeping this engagement; and had finally agreed with himself not to make excuses from fear lest he should seem to take a conventional invitation altogether too seriously. Besides, he supposed that there would be other guests. But when Elsie appeared in a soft, white morning-gown, as fresh and as enjoyable as herself, she explained negligently that they were to lunch alone.

"I tried to get Isabelle and Ned," she added. "But they had engagements or something. You seem to have

made a great impression on Isabelle. She asked me a string of questions about you, which, of course, I couldn't answer."

As Jack did not rise to her sally, she continued idly:—

"Why didn't Isabelle look at you instead of Frank! You're both such solemn puritans, you would have fitted. She ought to know that brother is a weak brother, and always will be."

"Perhaps she does," Jack observed dryly.

"Well, then, if she wanted him, why didn't she marry him years ago, instead of moping along like a young widow!"

"Possibly the General objected?"

"No," Elsie replied impartially. "Neither the General nor Roger exactly fancied the connection, but Isabelle could manage them. And there would have been money enough even for Frank's idle hands. No! She had some idea, a theory, that he must be successful, do something first, show that he could support her at least. All silly sentiment! She might have seen he wasn't that kind, and been willing to pay for him, if she wanted him. But she is sentimental, like you, Jack."

She ended with this provocative fling, turning her eyes full upon him.

"Do you call it sentimental to wish that the man you are going to marry should show himself worthy of the honor?" Jack retorted bluntly.

"Tut, tut, friend,—who is worthy of the honor of Isabelle's fair hand?" she said, mimicking his grave tone. "No, it's one thing or the other. She loves him

and wants him, or doesn't love him. That's what I told her two years ago when Frank made a fizzle of it in Mr. Cushing's business. 'Look here, Isabelle,' I said. 'He isn't nearly good enough for you; even he can see it. He is selfish, weak, and I'm afraid, deceitful. If he had had any money, nobody would find all that out—his nice manners and parlor tricks would have carried him through life. But Bushy won't do anything more for him, and papa can't. It sounds brutal for me to say it, but I wish you would break with him, Isabelle.' ”

“And what did she answer?” Jack asked, with curiosity.

“Oh! she drew herself up with that haughty smile, as if she were teaching the vulgar what it means to be well-born, and said, ‘Perhaps I care more for him because he needs some one.’ ”

Elsie laughed, as she mimicked Isabelle Mather's icy tones. Then she resumed:—

“‘Why *don't* you marry your baby, then,’ I said. ‘Not until he cares enough for me to make a little place for himself in the world,’ she answered. ‘No matter how I might love him!’ So there you have her, and if you can understand her, you are cleverer than I am!”

“Do you think she cares still?” Jack asked, remembering Isabelle Mather's proud confession in his office.

Mrs. Cushing shrugged her shoulders.

“I should say she did! But we've spent a lot of time gabbing about other people. Let's have luncheon. We'll do very well by ourselves, don't you think so?”

She smiled and patted her plump hands, quite content

with the first impression she had made upon Jack, and sailed softly across the hall. Her color was high, and her voice buoyant. Having but just risen and had her bath, she seemed to look at life with amiability and content. She glanced about her rooms with satisfaction.

"I must show you everything after luncheon; but the dining room is the best, I think."

Jack felt that it was cool and large and dignified. He did not distinguish the lovely renaissance fireplace, the tapestries that concealed all but a few feet of the walls, the soft gold ceiling, the rug that was one in a year's importations. Mrs. Cushing, who was watching him from the door, frowned; and with her old impulsiveness, she took his arm and led him to one of the tapestries.

"That came from the Louville collection. Harry Battersen says there isn't another such piece to be had in Europe," she exclaimed impatiently. "See how soft the coloring is, and it is in very good condition."

As the young lawyer's eyes roved about the room, seeking to find some other point where he could show intelligently the expected admiration, she called his attention to the fireplace.

"Ferguson, the architect, got it for me from a palace in Pisa. The figures are said to be by Arnolfo di Cambio."

She sank into a large Italian renaissance chair, and motioned to him to take a similar one opposite her.

"I got these when I first went to Italy after my marriage. They aren't bad, but they are too heavy for the room. I'm looking for some smaller ones. The table is a beauty, isn't it? I found it in Rome. It's the exact

form of a table in one of Veronese's pictures. The legs are particularly good."

She rambled on while the servants served the luncheon. Jack listened, amused at the knowing way in which she displayed her information, — not braggingly to impress him with her luxury, but from pride in a new acquisition. So far as he was concerned, the room might have been done in polished cabinet work by Davenport or in imitation Flemish. A dining room was still a dining room to him, and very little else. But he was keenly conscious of the splendid setting the dark room, the tapestried walls, the massive chair, created for the smiling woman opposite him. She seemed more opulent, more sensuous and commanding, than of old. Instinctively she had amassed the furniture that became her bloom.

"I believe a home should express your own individuality," she said, with complacent enjoyment of the platitude, as they went upstairs to the library for their coffee. "Everything here is like me, is *mine*," she pronounced with emphasis. "I have spent days, months, in selecting every article of furniture, — every chair and picture and rug, down to the paper-cutters on the table."

"You have succeeded," Jack responded, a little wearily.

"This is my last treasure. Stand there."

She touched the electric light, and pointed to a Renoir, — the picture of a girl lying in a sun-beaten field, her naked flesh strangely spotted with light.

"Hasn't that force? Doesn't it glow? He is a magician, that man."

Jack, who had not risen to the higher notes of the im-

pressionists, looked at it suspiciously. His untrained eyes refused to enjoy the plague-spotted flesh, the metallic lustre of the fields.

"You don't like it!" Mrs. Cushing exclaimed disappointedly. "Look at my Maufras, then."

Thus they made the tour of the long room, and Jack responded as freely as he could to the constant demand for appreciation. Something made him feel that she herself did not thoroughly enjoy her own treasures; her mood was too restless.

"Come!" she said at last. "The coffee will get cold, and you don't care for pictures. I am boring you."

"No, not that," Jack protested. "You make me feel fearfully ignorant. You have gone so far beyond me."

"One can pick it all up easily enough, if one cares," she replied graciously, lighting her cigarette and handing the tray to Jack. "Perhaps you don't care—are too serious."

"I'm afraid I'm not as quick as you are, Mrs. Cushing."

"Why Mrs. Cushing, Mr. Pemberton?" she asked, removing her cigarette and looking steadfastly at Jack, who turned his head away to avoid an answer. "Don't you like me any more than you do my house, Jack?" she persisted.

"Oh!" he answered, with a laugh, "I always think of you now as my client, Mrs. Cushing."

"Now?" she questioned, in a lower tone. "I never forget."

"Nor I," he responded calmly, looking at her once

more. After the silence had grown embarrassing, he added: "But I think we had best regard that as closed, don't you?"

"As you wish," she agreed briskly. But her look puzzled him. With Elsie it was never as any one else thought best; it was as she thought best.

In a few minutes she reverted to the house.

"I am pleased with my things. I think I have made something of my home. It isn't just a big barn where some one has dumped a lot of furniture and money. And I have interesting people here, too; as interesting as you find in America. They say it's a place where men talk and women listen. Don't you think that's worth while?"

"It might depend on the women."

"You've made up your mind not to be pleased."

"I am glad, indeed, you have found what you wanted."

"Oh! I don't say that. Only bores find what they want. But I've found what a good many other people want!"

Jack laughed, and looked at his watch.

"Oh, Frank! I had nearly forgotten brother in the excitement of seeing you. I have the money."

Her cool, matter-of-fact manner jarred on the young lawyer. "Will you send it to the office to-morrow?" he asked, rising.

"Why, you might as well take it now, hadn't you?"

She pushed her cigarette into the ash-tray and fluttered across the room to an old desk, which was laden with unopened notes. After a time she found a long envelope

and gave it to Jack. "There's the money, in bills," she said. "We'll consider what to do with him next."

"I will count it, and give you a receipt," the lawyer replied, sitting down at the smoking-table again. Mrs. Cushing lit another cigarette and opened some letters, while Jack drew out the bills and counted them. They were five hundreds and thousands. After a time he glanced up nervously, exclaiming:—

"There's a mistake! The amount was twenty-five thousand, and there is a good deal more here."

"Oh!" Mrs. Cushing blushed, and then answered quickly: "I thought it best that the sum be paid in whole—not to compromise with those people. They would always talk, you know."

Jack looked at her hard. He knew that she was lying. Finally he began to count the bills again.

"I am very glad," he observed, still looking at her. She burst into laughter, and laughed for several minutes nervously.

"What's the use of fibbing! It isn't my idea at all. It's Isabelle's, and the money is hers, too. *I* couldn't get it in four days! Of course, I borrowed it; and I promised Isabelle I wouldn't let any one know, not even you. So you mustn't tell, will you? She was very keen that you shouldn't know. But I could see at once that you suspected me."

"I shan't be likely to tell," Jack answered gravely. "It is the full amount, plus the interest, to the last cent. Here is a receipt, which you will return to me when you have received the other receipt."

She laid the piece of paper on the cigarette tray, and clasping her hands behind her head, looked coolly at the man.

“Why don’t you take to Isabelle, Jack? You would fit very well. You have the same prejudices!”

“Against prevarication?” Jack asked, holding out his hand.

Mrs. Cushing laughed good-naturedly, as she gave him her hand.

CHAPTER VI

NEVERTHELESS he went again and again to the house with the excuse of business or without it. For Elsie had not exaggerated when she boasted that men liked her house, and that one heard good talk there. To a young man engaged in the solitary struggle of New York with few houses where he could go for something more than a meal, it was a revelation of social delights. There at supper after the theatre he met men of all the professions, and they talked, as Elsie had said, and the women listened. The frequenters of the house accepted him cordially as a new recruit, and very soon his shy, taciturn self-consciousness wore away. He discovered in himself an unknown treasure of humor and good-fellowship, which relieved the homely intellectual honesty of his mind. The other men recognized his intelligence, and cared little for his ignorance of æsthetic small talk.

At first he had taken himself to task for thus slipping into new relations with Elsie and her world, but it came about so gradually and naturally, with so many innocent pretexts, that he soon forgot his scruples, or laughed at them as affectations. And Elsie made no attempt to recall the past. She accepted his terms laid down that first Sunday afternoon, and treated him altogether as a new acquaintance, whom she admitted to her circle on

terms of perfect equality. She flattered him by emphasizing this new relationship of equality. He was asked to the most interesting dinners and suppers that she gave, and she honored him by according him no special intimacy, no advantage over the others due to old friendship. Before, she had petted him and domineered, like a privileged sister. Now she gave him what she gave the world, and it pleased his pride. From her house he went to others, where he was also welcomed for his own sake. Thus Elsie again in his new, man's life indirectly steered him and shaped the world for him. Her first crude lessons at Pemberton Neck had given him the desire to reach beyond the hotel; now, more skilful and subtle in her methods, she taught him to enjoy, to understand art and people and life.

For a time, moreover, he went to her house to see Isabelle Mather, who was visiting Mrs. Cushing, and asked him to call. Employing many tactful feminine devices, Elsie threw them together until the two stubborn natures softened toward one another, understood and respected each other, sharing silent sympathies unknown to Elsie's positive soul. It was during this visit that Miss Mather had her last meeting with her old lover, and made it clear to him that he had lost all but the woman's pitying contempt. Jack Pemberton, who had Mason in charge during his short stay in New York, saw that the man realized this as his greatest misfortune. What he had always taken lightly, as a thing of course, — Isabelle's love for him, — had melted away during the years of his incapacity. And the best thing that Jack had to report

of him to his sister, when he returned from seeing Mason off at the steamer, was this subdued, unrebelling regret, this sense of irreparable loss. "The only thing left for me to do is to keep out of their way for good," he had said, and Jack had nodded assent.

When Miss Mather ended her visit a few days later, she asked Jack to visit her father and her at Pemberton Neck.

"I shall never go back there," he replied quickly.

"Well, then, next fall at Riverside," she persisted.

"Perhaps some time," he accepted vaguely.

A few days after Miss Mather had left, he dropped in at the Madison Avenue house on his way home from his office, and found Elsie alone. She had just come in from a concert, one of a series given by subscription to revive old music — very dull, as most of the patrons confessed, but instructive and intellectually praiseworthy. Some of the ennui of the afternoon survived in her listless attitude. She leaned forward over the blaze of the fire, whipping her skirt restlessly with her long gloves. Now and then she looked at the man with a slow, inquiring gaze that puzzled him. Elsie's silent moods were discomforting.

"I heard from Mr. Cushing to-day," she said at last. "He will be home in a week. Then I suppose we shall go to the country, or abroad. He wants to go to the country, and I to St. Moritz, for the summer. Bushy is more tolerable abroad," she burst out in her old manner.

"So you leave town soon," Jack observed.

"Very soon," she answered, looking at him as she had before. "And I don't want to leave this spring—I never wanted to leave so little!"

He made the commonplace rejoinder demanded, and she studied the fire again. Soon she exclaimed:—

"Jack! Jack, I want you to do something for me."

"What is it?" he asked, on his guard, disturbed by her troubled mood.

"Oh! you needn't be afraid, Mr. Lawyer. It's nothing criminal. I want you to go home and dress and come back for dinner. I am alone to-night, and I have the creeps when I dine alone."

He offered some excuses, but she moved her hand impatiently.

"Will you or will you not?"

"I will," he answered slowly, ashamed of his own nervousness. "In fact, I shall be most glad to."

When he returned, an hour later, Mrs. Cushing had not come down, and he was shown to the library. He had learned to like this room, to feel its warmth and twilight repose. He understood a little better the real value of the things it contained, although he still held out against the mottled Renoir. The man deftly arranged a little table before the fire, and placed the cigarettes and the evening papers by his side. Then he brought some absinthe and a cocktail, and, arranging the electric lights so that the larger part of the great room was in dusk, he went out softly. Everything in Elsie's establishment moved with the utmost precision and ease, creating an atmosphere absolutely

free from friction. Evidently she had understood from the first that what the world needs is to be soothed, and if one wishes to attract desirable people, one must give them a subconscious, physical content. Then, as Jack knew, she had a wonderfully good head for detail, for executive management. She did not fritter away her strength in petty worries.

Jack leaned back and closed his eyes, feeling, as for the first time, the comfort and charm and exceeding quiet of the place, which penetrated his limbs and lapped him away to dreams. He had not cared for atmosphere in the old days of his youth; this sense of physical peace was new and strange. It was the new Elsie! In a flash he saw her marvellous unfolding from the society of Zenobia, Ohio, the boarding-school, the European vagabondage, the New York apartment house, the summer seaside cottage, to this. And she had unfolded from the loud, slangy, "breezy" American girl, quick-witted and uneducated, to the woman who knew rather more than the names of things, who was sure of herself and her world, who had picked what she wanted from the vulgar profusion of riches, and fitted to herself an environment like a glove! Yes, it was admirable, but he did not admire. In the rapid bloom of the hybrid there had emerged something hard, metallic, common, which he did not analyze, but which he felt, like the touch of iron. She had gone far, but she had reached the crest of her wave. When she was silent and thought, was she conscious that she lacked something — was she dissatisfied with the result of her creation?

She was a long time dressing, he thought, when a clock struck seven and a half. But she cared more now for dress, and all the physical details of life, than she had as a girl. She never neglected her hours for exercise—the swimming-pool, the ride in the Park, or, if the weather was bad, fencing. The masseuse, the manicure, the teacher of physical culture,—each had his allotted moments of the full day. The care of her beautiful body was first in the category of her duties. Mrs. Cushing was not one to come out of the season haggard and worn; the morning after the hardest evening of the week she was fresh and redundantly vital. All was perfectly arranged and thought out!

He lit another cigarette, sipped the last drops of the cocktail, and stole about the room, opening books, examining the bibelots, whose jargon he had heard so often of late. She was nothing to him, he kept saying, with a feeble delight in the phrase. She was but a good dinner and a vivacious hour of talk. He knew her, alas! He knew her to the remotest corner of the soul he had once loved, like a dog, as grown men do not love, with worship and reverence and faith, with a subduing sense of the mystery in woman. Perhaps she had taught him most kindly the lesson of life that savage summer morning beside the pool of cold sea water. . . .

The silence made the man nervous. What was in the woman's mind this afternoon? Why had she need of him? He could not talk, nor flatter her pride and conceit, nor add fame to her house, nor tickle her vanity, nor even make love to her! He might be useful

to her, but he was scarcely decorative. The unornamental and necessary furniture of life she was wont to shove out of sight. And while he waited in the dim, silent room, penetrated with the silences of the other rooms, the aloofness of the great house, strange fancies flitted through his sensible mind; wild thoughts of mad acts, sinful, inhuman visions of deeds done beyond the confines of this moral world of ours — souls without regret, without bonds, not tethered with the halting lassitude of our dull, weary lives, — such moments as spring unforeseen upon the temperate and restrained, disclosing caverns under their well-ordered acts where strange passions seethe. . . .

“ You are here ! ”

At the rustle of her dress he had started, as if detected in some furtive act, and he tried to gain his usual composure by the matter-of-fact phrases which he uttered.

“ An hour or more, I should say. When do you usually dine ? ”

“ It doesn't make any matter to-night, does it ? I told Thompson eight. Shall we go now ? ”

Her eyes were unnaturally bright. He would have said, if he had not known her to be abstemious, that she had been drinking, or had taken some poison to dilate the pupils. But she smiled tranquilly, interpreting his nervousness as a tribute to her appearance. For her little dinner *intime* she had taken the trouble to put on full evening dress. Now that her figure had gained a number of pounds, she needed splendor more than simplicity.

They dined, rather dully and gloomily. All the gayety

and sprightliness of her usual mood were snuffed out, and if it had not been for the intense brilliancy of her eyes, he would have thought her bored. She scarcely spoke after he had started to talk about Stevenson and his work on the little Iowa railroad. Under the scrutiny of her eye, he rambled on in great detail about the railroad, its misfortunes, and Stevenson's plucky fight to save his father's fortune in these hard times. He explained the situation of the road, the legal questions, the bonds, the debenture stock, the common stock — talking in a haze, with the eagerness of a man who talks to prove that he is not drunk. Mrs. Cushing ate little, and merely touched her champagne with her lips. But he drank more than usual, gaining a certain command of his nervousness from the wine. Finally, as Elsie had ceased to eat altogether and sat resting her elbows upon the table, her eyes fixed upon him, he broke off his tale.

"I don't know why I am so stupid to-night, and bore you with all this shop."

"I like it," she responded slowly. "I like to hear you talk about affairs — business. You make it clear and important. You are a man now, and you talk well — very well, Jack."

As he did not continue, she made an effort to start him once more.

"So your friend has been in New York to see about raising money. What has he done?"

This he had told long before, and he saw that her mind had been wandering all the time while her eyes were fixed upon him. When he failed to reply, she pushed

back her chair, and silently they returned to the library where their coffee was waiting.

"No, you are not very brilliant to-night," she observed accusingly. "We will go to the opera instead of staring each other out of countenance all the evening."

The carriage was waiting at the door. He realized that she had intended all the time to go. While they were driving the few blocks, he heard her rapid breathing, as if she were greatly excited, but whenever she spoke, her voice was slow and dull. The second act of the opera had begun when they entered the box. Elsie dropped into a chair near the door, and motioned to him to take the one beside her. From where they sat nothing was visible but the florid ceiling and the vast arch of the upper stage, and for once the house was hushed, the chatter from the boxes extinguished, as Ternina's voice rose in the long triumphant desire of Isolde —

" . . . wie sie es wendet
wie sie es endet,
was sie mir küret,
wohin mich führet
ihr ward ich zu eigen :
nun lass' mich gehorsam zeigen ! "

The woman beside him closed her eyes, and seemed to sink into the waves of sound. The soft, passionate, insistent duet began with its recurrent melody, its leaping, quivering, maddening ecstasy — the music of the body, the poignant cry of the nerves. At first the music stilled his nervous tremor, calmed him like an opiate, but as the themes returned, ever higher, ever more yearn-

ing for satisfaction of desire, for peace to the body, the pulses in his hands beat faster, and the strange madness of music, the intoxication wilder than the intoxication of drug or wine, overcame his senses. The fever flooded ever fiercer, submerging the little landmarks of resolution, glorifying the common thoughts of common things—pleading, demanding, promising, revealing. . . .

She was breathing faster in obedience to the same influence, abandoning herself with less resistance to the seductive draught, assuaging the savage instincts of her tortuous nature in the moralless, enervating bliss of the music. With the last note, at the sound of the wooden rap-rap, tap-tap of the applause, she opened her eyes and looked at the man, one long sigh fluttering from her lips.

“Jack, Jack!” she murmured drowsily, as if scarcely awakened from a wonderful sleep.

His hand met hers, and they waited, not knowing themselves, their hearts beating loudly, calling across the little space between their bodies. And in those moments, while the audience moved and made little human, discordant noises, proving to themselves that they were just the same little people with proper ideas and moral codes, these two trembled and looked into each other’s eyes, afraid and tempted, each searching the mystery of the other!

“Come, let’s go,” she whispered, gathering up her opera cloak. Jack followed her, his body still stiff and unfamiliar. She led the way to some little-used exit, and they found themselves in the damp night, through which filtered the flakes of a spring snowstorm. She

took his arm, and they walked up the sloppy pavement, heedless of the loungers, of the swirling wisps of clotted snow.

"And now?" Jack asked, trying to throw off the weight that clogged his mind.

"We will go home — not back there. Come, here's a carriage," and with sudden energy she sprang into a waiting cab. He gave the address and pulled the door to, then turned to look at her, — gravely, doubtingly, his heart still beating fiercely.

"You meant it!" he said accusingly.

"Yes, I meant it!" she exclaimed, her face close to his, her eyes answering his defiantly. "And I am glad, I am glad."

CHAPTER VII

A BED of red fire gleamed through the gray ashes on the hearth. The room was permeated with the pleasant warmth and pungent odors of the burned wood. A reading lamp, and the rosy glow from the hearth, barely revealed one corner, and touched the white surface of a marble torso.

Elsie slipped the long cloak from her shoulders and tossed it upon a chair, turning with the same swift motion to Jack, who stood quite still before the fire.

"Yes!" she exclaimed, a slight smile on her lips, her hands outstretched to him. "I am glad, glad!"

The man, drawn by the gesture, the triumphant words, the shining face, slowly responded to her appeal, coming nearer and nearer until he felt the repressed breathing, the subtle dilation of the warm, vital creature almost within his arms. For a moment they stood thus without words, the woman's lips still smiling in joyous welcome, her arms reached to him. In the chaotic swirl of thought and feeling, the man paused, knowing the trick and hating it, understanding in one swift revelation all the power and recklessness of the woman,—his heart strangely dead within him, but his blood singing savagely in every vein of his body. The poignant, appealing strains of the music he had just heard sounded in his ears like the

phrase of fate, and she, too, was hearing those strains and yielding to their sensuous impulsion. For a moment, thus, they swayed before the wind of passion.

"For I love you, love you, love you," she said, iterating the word with savage emphasis. "And you have loved me always!"

He cried vainly, blindly, "No! no!"—a cry that closed in pain and inarticulate moan,—and then he seized her and kissed her lips, as they smiled triumphantly at him. They were soft and cool, fresh as the surface of rain-washed fruit. As he touched them, the sensuous glow of her body enveloped him,—the spell of the woman as woman, with all her hidden instincts, her beguiling, unseen mastery of flesh. The repressed rage, the carnal temptations of his race, swept over the man, surging in him like the maddening music,—the one great desire that would be appeased, even to death.

"I love you, love you, love you," she repeated in her triumph, bringing him nearer within the circle of her arms, her lips still close to his.

"I almost—hate you!" he answered dully. In the silence of the dim room something seemed to break, like the snapping of a taut ligament. He seized her arms and held her away, looking into her eyes, which were soft and wet. The intensity of her gaze had melted in the dream. Her eyes slowly closed. He held her thus in his rough grip, fighting for one last moment, in one last struggle against the insane visions, the cravings of his body.

"No! no!" she murmured. "*I* know. You will love me always. Why fight?"

Ah! Why fight! From his long fight with the ghosts of things as they are, he had won nothing, nothing — not one appeasement, one comforting truth, one little sip of the wine of life. Why fight for things unseen, and not take what was within his hands! Swiftly, thinking long thoughts without the lapse of time, he made his last struggle, unconscious of all but the face before him, the woman he held in his convulsive grip. Imperceptibly her face faded, the sure joyousness departed from it, and she besought him with her eyes not to fail her. This appeal awoke the old vision of his youth, his boyish dream upon the hillside, but the woman's face was another's. This was the appeal of despair, of defeat! For the first time in years he saw the other as he had seen it in the clear October sunlight of his dream, and the vision of it stayed his heart. The beast died out of him. He opened his hands and staggered back into the gloom of the room.

“Jack! Jack!”

The cry rang out, forlornly, entreatingly; he stepped forward in unconscious obedience to it. But the spell had broken. Painfully, with a physical sensation, like the lifting of vast, dead weight, his will asserted itself. There came to him the curious consciousness of having a will, the power to lift, to thrust something from him, to act!

“Jack, you can't leave me! You love me, don't you understand? And now I have you, and it has come together, our love. What is the matter, Jack? What is the matter? We have waited, oh, so long! I have been blind and stupid. I did not know, when you spoke

in the Park, years ago, you remember. It has taken me all this time to learn, to be a woman. Now I know—it is the one thing, the whole.”

She spoke rapidly, laying her hand upon his arm in the old manner of intimate appeal.

“It is yours, Jack, all that I have, everything—everything you wanted, once.”

The feeling of will,—the sense of heavy weights to be lifted, lifted, and held firm,—clogged his tongue. Finally he said, in a drowsy voice as to himself:—

“Yes, I want you, Elsie! My God, how I want you! And I hate you! . . . I want your eyes and your hair, your lips and your body,” he cried, more wildly, wrenching out the brutal words.

She listened, the soft, sensuous dream stealing over her warm face once more.

“And I want you, Jack! I have learned, at last. Give me peace—peace,” she repeated softly, her arms falling by her side.

“I cannot,” he whispered, breathing hard, once more grasping her arms and drawing her to him, then pushing her away. “I—will not! Do you hear? I *will* not! I want you, but I *will* not.”

He repeated the words mechanically and again walked away as if to feel that he could walk. Elsie dropped into a chair and leaned toward the fire, covering her face with her hands.

“Coward!” she moaned desperately. “Coward!”

He came and stood by her.

“Yes, coward!” he repeated after her. “Yes, coward!”

"A man! to hold what you have wanted for years in your arms and afraid to—to take it! Listen! I am a woman—a bad woman, you think. That doesn't trouble me. I have learned to take from life what I want. And if I were to suffer for it, years of hell, such as they talk about to frighten us, I would still take it. Yes, I would take it and smile through my years of hell—smile gladly, having once tasted joy and known what it is. I would pay, but you—"

"I am afraid!" he said bluntly. "Not of hell and what you talk about. But I am afraid—of myself."

He could not phrase the subtle fear that had held him that moment; that had shown him the twilight land beyond reason and a man's will.

"Afraid!" she sneered. "Ah, Jack, Jack!"

Her soul knew no fears; what she touched and saw, that only she knew.

"I should kill you," he burst out. "I want you, and I should kill you out there in the desert beyond life when we were both mad. I should kill you, Elsie, and then kill myself."

She trembled in spite of his calm tones, feeling the stronger currents of his nature, which threatened to sweep her under. He knelt by her chair and whispered to her:—

"So it's best not! I see. I *know*. It's best not. I should kill you, Elsie!"

She looked into his eyes, and said slowly:—

"Well. Kill me, then!"

The little ground of resolution he had won slipped

back beneath his feet. His eyes burned; his hands sweated, as if the body shared the toil of the soul. He held her again in his arms, and again the yielding flesh, the caressing eyes and face, the warm beating blood called him insistently. . . . The moments danced past, while his heart stood still.

"Then kill me!" she repeated softly.

He staggered to his feet, throwing her aside, and strode down the room. At the door he paused. She was crying in little sobs of despair and rage. He listened, hesitated,—and plunged forward into the dark hall.

The snow had ceased to fall, leaving a cool, dark, starry vault of heaven. On the pavements the soft mat of fresh snow muffled the footfalls of the few wayfarers. The night was calm and luminous, and the great buildings of the city seemed asleep and peaceful. He walked up the broad avenue, pleased with the silence of his muffled steps. His limbs hung heavy, and he felt his body in every muscle. But the tumult of his mind was gone, as a bank of fog is scattered by some strong wind. The vast, cool heavens exhilarated him; he felt strangely conscious of moving and being, of mere existence upon the inanimate earth. Thus for miles he went, calm and sure with measured stride, up through the houses, into the deserted Park, on up the heights of the farther city, and beyond the straggling apartment buildings, walking upon the earth which suddenly was new, made afresh, created by that act of will which had torn him.

Something created! Something real! Something his own! Out of the shadows of things, out of the broken ideals, the wooden dummies with which he had labored so many years, a world seemed to be born, a new world that was true to the touch, where he could live and work untormented by shadows. He felt the eternal conviction of will, undebatable and undemonstrable,—the will that shapes and makes; the will that creates the real from the unreal; the will that out of pain and labor gives peace!

CHAPTER VIII

"You look as if you had been up against something pretty hard," Stevenson remarked frankly to Jack, after scrutinizing his face for some moments. "Too much work! No vacation in three years, and this damned roar always beating in your ears! That's no way to live; out with us there's work enough for any man, but we don't live beyond a five-cent fare from the open country. That's the great thing, — to know you *can* get away from a white shirt and a typewriter any day you want to. Why won't you come out and try it for a time? They aren't making it so fearfully seductive here, are they?"

"I think I will try it for good," Jack answered deliberately, wheeling about in his chair. "Kimball comes back next week, and I've no obligations to stay on after that. I have been meaning to write you that I was thinking of it."

The big man rose and slowly put out his heavy hand.

"We'll make a man of you," he exclaimed, trying feebly to express his joy. "God, how I have wanted you within a couple of hundred miles! We'll pull this railroad business off sure, now, and it'll make you rich."

Jack smiled ironically at Stevenson's indomitable hyperbole, but the big man's mood exhilarated him.

"Listen," Stevenson continued, striding about the office

in his excitement. "I'll tell you the whole thing. It's this way: either we win, and the governor saves all he's worked for, and a lot of other people who've put their savings in — or — but there's no 'if' and 'or' about it. We've got to win, if we take to guns to do it."

Jack, who knew pretty accurately the state of affairs with the Iowa and Northern, was less sanguine of ultimate success, but in his present frame of mind that consideration influenced him little.

"When the hard times came on," Stevenson broke in, "we had things in pretty good shape as I told you. We had just made some favorable traffic arrangements, the new extensions were paying, and we had a dividend in sight. Then every one in the country got a sour-belly view of things, and now it's hard scratching to pay the interest on the bonds."

"Do you know where the bonds are?" Jack asked suddenly.

"I heard that a bum firm of New York brokers, Greene or something, were buying all that were offered."

"And from Greenacre they went to whom, do you suppose?"

"Give it up. They were cheap enough, — in the forties, — but I don't see what your eastern capitalists wanted of them. That's been bothering us a good deal."

"I don't know what Greenacre wanted of them, but General Mather has his block now."

Jack explained briefly the transactions following the Greenacre failure.

"Well," Stevenson commented, "so long as we can pay

the interest, it don't matter. The bonds represent only a fraction of what's gone into the road, and we don't propose to give any of your Wall Street speculators a chance to freeze us out."

The two men went up town to dine at Stevenson's hotel, and continued their discussion of the Iowa and Northern affairs far into the evening. Big Steve could talk of nothing else.

He had inherited his faith in the little railroad from his father; he believed in it with all the fire in his big body; he had a sentiment for it as for some righteous cause. His enthusiasm touched his less excitable friend. Jack felt the romance of the story,—the fight that the elder Stevenson had made for his fortune and the fortunes of his friends who had trusted him. He accepted Stevenson's large hopes for the future, "when the country recovered from its sour-belly fit and went to work." According to Stevenson there was a place for the Iowa and Northern in the scheme of creation, and that place must be won. So it was arranged that Jack should enter the legal department of the road in Mound City, where Stevenson also had his headquarters as assistant general manager. Together they would fight the coming fight and save the road from "a Wall Street reorganization." Jack was fired with the sense of freer life and creative purpose, which the big man breathed; out there in that new land a man might see his will take shape and grow!

As they parted that night, Stevenson remarked:—

"I'd hoped to see Mrs. Cushing this trip. But her place is closed up, and the servant said she'd gone to

Europe. She don't let time hang heavy on her hands; this is the second time I've missed her. Have you seen much of her lately?"

"Yes, a good deal," Jack answered.

"Pretty gay ranch, isn't it?"

"So people say," Jack replied impassively.

Stevenson soon turned to another subject.

"What's become of the Mathers?"

"That's a long story, and not for to-night."

Jack learned that Elsie had gone to Europe, with a sudden feeling of relief. For the triumphant mood of the night when he had left her had ebbed as the conquering moods of the will must ebb, and again and again he had lived over the struggle of will and desire. Once, twice, since the day of his temptation, he had gone to the Madison Avenue house, drawn by the terrible insanity, the abnegation of will, which forces the climber to the precipice. He had looked at the door and passed. He learned that he could pass! Between the real and the unreal lay that misty chasm, from which for all his life he had escaped during those long moments in that silent room, his face to hers.

There were a number of things to be done before he could start the new life in the little Iowa town. He had thrown himself into the plan with all his will: he would close the old chapters of his life and begin the new one without links to the past. When he gave notice of his intentions to his firm, Mr. Hodder sent for him and expressed his regret. Mr. Kimball asked some searching

questions about the new position, and when Jack mentioned the name of the railroad, the two lawyers exchanged glances. Mr. Kimball remarked:—

“That’s a pretty shaky concern! Don’t you think you are ill-advised to go into it before you have looked over the situation more carefully? The Iowa and Northern has a bad reputation.”

“I have no large stake,” Jack replied. “I shall get a salary, and when that ceases I must look elsewhere.”

“You are giving up a good opening,” Mr. Hodder remonstrated. “We had intended when the times improved to make a new arrangement, a very favorable arrangement, for you.”

Jack, after acknowledging the implied offer, stated his determination to leave New York, to start in a smaller place, “where a man counted for more.”

Mr. Kimball observed, smiling indulgently:—

“I don’t know where a man counts for more in our country than in New York, provided he’s the right man.”

“You mean where a man can earn more money,” the young lawyer corrected, with a laugh.

“And position, and professional standing,” Mr. Hodder added gravely.

“It is a personal question,” Jack replied, after reflection. “I don’t believe I want merely money, or position, or professional reputation, assuming that I could win all that.”

“Yes, it is a personal question,” Kimball assented coldly, feeling that he had been mistaken in the maturity

of the capable young man before him. "But I think you would find few men of our profession who would prefer Mound City, Iowa, to a favorable opening in New York."

"Probably," Jack agreed, and the discussion ended there.

He went about his preparations with a certain exhilaration, as if he were arranging for a holiday. Everything seemed possible,—a mood of optimism caught from Stevenson, or latent in himself, and repressed while he toiled over compromises and adjustments in the office of Hodder and Kimball. He determined to take his sister with him, for his mother had died early in the winter, leaving Mary at the age of thirty with the cautious habits and views of an elderly spinster. There were also Ruth's two little children to be looked out for. They should have the chance he had lightly promised their dying mother,—a chance in a new world, his new world. Concerning this plan he wrote Miss Mather, who was at Pemberton Neck; finally Aunt Julia brought the children to New York.

"Your uncle is too old to travel," she explained to Jack, complacently, enjoying the experience, with an air of self-congratulation upon her superior mobility. "And your uncle ain't decided in his own mind yet whether you're on the right road. He's waitin' for you to come to the Neck and put up a new hotel, or somethin'. But I trust yer, Jock. The dreamin' ain't done no harm to anybody so fer."

In his exuberant mood of will, his fresh imagination, he formed another plan; before he left New York and

his old life, he would find Stella, and make her follow his new fortunes. When he saw her and opened his plan to her, she was sullen at first, and disinclined to talk with him; finally she agreed to walk with him out to the Park and hear what he had to say.

"I shall find something out there for you," he ended, "if you want it,—if you want to live with your child and take care of it."

"There ain't nothing for me," Stella answered, with the settled dreariness of lassitude and poverty. "When a woman's getting old, like I am —"

"Oh, yes, there is," he interrupted, the irrepressible hopefulness springing freshly before the darkest problems. "It's only the wish! Steve will be free in a little while."

"What's that to me or to you?" she asked sullenly.

"It ought to be something to you, and I think it will be," he replied, overbearing her discouragement. And he persisted in his idea until his strong purpose had prompted the flabby resolution of the woman. She saw nothing but the gravel path before her feet and the shabby clothes upon her body, and he saw more. In time she came to see with him a little way into the dim future of things. They went back to the city, and when Jack left her, she had her own glimmer of hope.

"If you don't go back on it, like the rest," she concluded fearfully. "You won't forget?"

"Not for one day."

He had finished what there was for him to do in New

York, and a sense of peace and content stole over him while he treaded the noisy streets these last days.

The second morning of the journey to Mound City, the train was crossing the fertile farms of northern Illinois, rolling on for indefinite miles through broad corn-lands among the low hills. Very early in the morning Jack awoke and watched the monotonous landscape with a keen interest in the aspect of the slightest things. He left the close car and stood upon the platform, soothed by the slow rhythm of the great train and the fresh air of the summer day. It was an uninspiring country,—mile after mile of rolling hill and corn-covered plain, broken at intervals by small shabby houses standing beside large barns and windmills that were lazily sweeping their iron wings in the morning air. The corn was rank and high, barely tasselled, rich with early juices. It was a peaceful and fertile land,—ribbed with black loamy roads that ran over the low hills to distant horizons. Now and then the train rumbled over a culvert above a muddy stream already sunk between its clayey banks in summer drought. Not a beautiful country, surely! But to the young man who watched it unroll from the speeding train, it seemed a land vitally real, a land of work, rich in promise and fertile in fulfilment.

The train slackened speed and halted at a rough wooden shed on the outskirts of an ugly little town named Evergreen Springs. Some heavy farm wagons, their broad tires caked with dirt from the clay roads, stood about the station, loading farming machinery from the freight

shed. The strip of road beyond the station was thick with fine dust, and the grass along its border, yellow and dead. The summer sun lay broad and warm upon the town and stifled the breeze from the prairies. Such was probably Mound City, but its slovenly aspect did not depress the stranger, who looked at it curiously.

Just beyond the town the train passed the walls of a dismantled factory building of considerable size. The abandoned look of the place was emphasized by the fertile fields that reached to its walls. Something broken and old and wasted, it rose sullenly in the cloudless sky. What was the meaning of its desolation here in this new country? The abortive expenditure of energy and purpose was a scar upon the land. Jack watched the crumbling stone walls recede behind the train, fascinated by its ruin where all was new. It spoke of old plans, purposes once strong and vital as his, that had ceased to act or had flowed into other channels, leaving this monument of their defeat to crumble into useless decay. Was it so with all effort? Did it have its day of life and energy, of existence, and then was it thrown aside like a used garment? Was all creation but the sport of the hour? And the world real for a moment,—was it unreal always?

Like a cloud out of the burnished sky the idea darkened the man's mind, while the train sped away from the deserted building—a mere speck upon the flat fields. Then he dismissed it from his mind unanswered. Often, however, during the future months while he was toiling in the routine of affairs, the picture of the abandoned

factory would rise, unwelcome, before his vision, and he would wonder whether all men in the stress of accomplishment were haunted by this imagination of defeat, of mistake. Again and again his strong will saved him, the will to put the vision away from his eyes, the will to believe that waste and abortive effort assisted, likewise, in creation. . . .

Stevenson was at the station in Mound City to welcome the newcomer, with his father and Black, who had come from the little town a hundred miles away where he was teaching. The elder Stevenson was a large, heavy man, loosely built like his son, ponderously shy and kind. They walked into the little city, and before they reached the brick building which contained the general offices of the Iowa and Northern, Jack felt that he had known the heavy, white-haired man for a long time. That evening they sat on the broad veranda of the Stevensons' house, where Jack was to make his home for the present, and talked as old friends who had come by different paths to meet each other. The silence of the summer night was broken now and then by a puffing locomotive, or the thud of freight cars as a long train buckled up in the yards below the city. The blue circles of the arc lamps outlined the rambling prairie town, and beyond their range there seemed to exist a vast country into which the locomotives disappeared with shrill, joyful calls.

CHAPTER IX

THE fight came even before it was expected. As Big Steve expressed it, Jack had scarcely time to get his coat off and to size up the ring, before the first round was called. Late in the summer the railroad defaulted on the interest on its bonds. The elder Stevenson had been to St. Louis and to Chicago to raise money, and had failed. Then he had turned to the bondholders, and, in company with the general counsel of the road and Jack, had held several meetings with them, and arranged the preliminaries for a receivership friendly to the real owners of the road. But the disturbing fact could not be disguised, that only a minority of the bondholders were represented at these meetings. Where were the other bonds, — scattered or in powerful hands?

Early in October, certain Eastern bondholders made application to the courts for foreclosure and the appointment of a receiver, and named a man who was connected with a rival road, the C. I. & M., one division of which ended at Mound City. This move disclosed the object of buying the bonds: the receivership proceedings were but the first step in taking possession of the Iowa and Northern, and selling it out to its stronger rival, at the merely nominal price of the bonds. If, as Stevenson remarked, the stock of the Iowa and Northern had been

mere water, as was the almost universal case in that part of the country, the proceeding would have been just enough. But in the belief of the Stevensons and the other people who had nursed the little railroad, the bonds represented less than a third of the true value of the property. Their interests, which they had struggled to preserve, would be wiped out in case the bondholders took possession.

So while Jack was settling his new family in one of the frame houses on the edge of the prairie town and gradually learning to comprehend his new situation, there were gloomy times in the little brick building that held the general offices of the Iowa and Northern. Under the leadership of Judge Bestor, the general counsel for the road and a large stockholder, the Stevenson forces prepared to fight. Their minority association of bondholders represented less than a third of the bonds, but nine-tenths of the stock, common and preferred. The elder Stevenson went East to secure the coöperation of the few bondholders he knew. But in spite of his best efforts, there seemed to be but one outcome for the situation. Thus the winter wore on. The two friends went over and over the affair, studying every aspect of the road's financial history to discover some loophole of escape.

"If it were only our pile," Big Steve remarked one Sunday, when they were reviewing the new developments of the week at Jack's dinner-table, "I can say without any flim-flam, the old man would lose without kicking much. He's mortgaged pretty nearly everything—all the farm lands up north, and the Dakota ranch, but he

could stand being wiped out even at sixty. So could I. There's enough money to be made, and it isn't the hardest trick in life to make money. But it's the others, the little fellers, the old friends, who put their money in because the governor urged them to; the shopkeepers in this little town, who've invested their savings in it; old Bill the agent up at Pine Forks — all of 'em!" he ended, with a gesture of despair.

"They can't lay the blame on you," Black, who was visiting Jack during his holidays, observed.

"Won't they!" Stevenson retorted brusquely. "You don't know humans much if you think that. They'll curse us worse than confidence men. They'll say we sold 'em out, and have got the profits packed away in a bank East. They'll say anything, and you would, too, if you saw all the few dollars you had scraped up in years just scratched from the slate by a bit of Wall Street 'reorganization.' How did you feel when the bank bust just as you started at college?"

"I didn't feel," Black answered humorously. "I was too much surprised to feel!"

"Well, if you'd had to start over again from the first, you'd have got over your surprise mighty quick!"

When Black left the room to find Mary, in whom he was more vividly interested than in the Iowa and Northern, Jack said slowly: —

"There's only one chance, Steve. We must get hold of Mather's bonds, if he's kept them."

"I have thought of that," the other replied. "But he mayn't have enough, and he mayn't have kept 'em.

Then what's the likelihood he's going to join us? It's much more likely he's in the other gang already."

"I rather think he has kept them, and if I remember rightly, they were a goodish lot. Do you know, from the fact that Hodder and Kimball made the application, I think the General is back of the Eastern crowd."

"Well?"

"We must get him to have a change of heart."

Big Steve shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd rather tackle a German Jew! You don't know the prejudices of that Boston crowd. If they see a chance of losing a cent, they get scared to death. Besides, the old General is a Tartar, isn't he? As hard as one of your Maine paving-stones?"

"Pretty nearly, but I should like to try him."

"You can have the opportunity fast enough, if you want it bad!"

When the elder Stevenson returned from the East, he confirmed Jack's conjectures: General Mather was the main part of the association of Eastern bondholders, who were acting through Hodder and Kimball as attorneys. Cushing, who had forced these securities upon the Mathers at the time of Greenacre's failure, had overreached himself. It seemed likely that the General would reap large profits from the despised bonds, and he was not the man to let his chance slip by unimproved. The elder Stevenson had as little confidence as his son that anything could be done in that direction. So matters drifted on until March. The hearing of the suit for foreclosure would be in April.

Jack could not abandon the idea that something might be done with the Mathers. He remembered the General's attitude in Hodder and Kimball's office that afternoon when he had accompanied his daughter; and though the old man's manner had been cold and hard, Jack believed that his mind was not closed to persuasion. As the date for the hearing drew near, and final defeat loomed more darkly on the horizon, the Stevensons listened to his arguments.

"We must try Mather," Jack iterated. "It's the last chance."

"We'll go on, then," Big Steve finally agreed. "We shall only be out our fares, anyway."

Even the elder Stevenson's eyes flashed with a trace of their old hopefulness.

"If he could only see it as I see it," he muttered to himself.

"We'll make him!" Jack asserted. "Let Judge Bestor get us every possible delay at Omaha. Get us a week or ten days if you can."

They left Mound City the next morning. The broad fields were still under the plough; here and there the first green of the grass colored the roadsides. As the train passed Evergreen Springs, the gaunt walls of the deserted factory struck Jack's eye. It stood there, in the new seed time, like an evil omen of failure! It had been a mistake. Man's effort in building its stout walls had been abortive. In the same way all the struggles of the brave old man they had left behind in Mound City were to prove useless — merely mistaken

energy. A month hence his labor and that of hundreds of others would be wiped from the world by a decree of court. All the invention and energy that had gone into the creation of the little Iowa and Northern was a waste.

Thus man created, as for eternity, and the work of his will crumbled sooner or later, to give place to some new piece of creation, indifferent or antagonistic to his. The world had been real for him, with limitless avenues for his eager feet, but the world died with him, or briefly thereafter. Thus cities grew and decayed, one generation destroying what another had striven to create. Why strive? Why not accept the wind of fate, as it blew, now harsh, now soft? In the interminable change, why seek for permanence?

Yet here he was, hastening with all the passion of his soul to interpose his hand, to strive against some other scheme of things, to make his own will prevail.

Yes! That was the condition of human life. Each man made his world, filled it with the molten metal of his own visions, created it, realized it, and lived in it! What matter, then, that his creations died early or late in the world of things? Would he take to himself the privilege of the gods? Was it not enough to live and create? . . . Jack unconsciously stretched his hands out to the passive earth, eager to walk upon it and act, an irresistible, unreasoning conviction of joy in existence flooding back to his body and soul.

He was less hopeful, however, two days later as he and Stevenson left their hotel in Boston to go to the

office of Lord, Mather, and Greenacre. Two days of railroad travel had given him time to see all the obstacles in his way and to feel the inevitable reaction from his enthusiasm for his plan. As he thought it out coldly, it was flimsy, quixotic, absurd, unbusinesslike. What good reason could he find to influence this cold, experienced man of affairs that he should sacrifice a sure, immediate advantage for the sake of justice to some remote people? Why should the General rely upon his word? It was sentimental, nonsensical, foredoomed to failure! Even Big Steve was less boyish and exuberant than usual. They walked up Washington Street, silent, each preoccupied with his own fears.

The old sign had disappeared. In its place in small gilt letters were two names: ROGER MATHER, and ROGER MATHER, JR. The firm had finally gone out of existence. Jack found some small comfort in that fact. They asked to see General Mather, and Jack sent in his card. Instead of the General, however, Ned Mather came from the inner office and welcomed them cordially.

"The General doesn't come in often," he explained, after the first greetings. "What can I do for you? You see I am harnessed at last, as well as Roger. He's in there."

Jack determined quickly to lay the case before young Mather, to secure his influence, however little it might be. They sat down there in the outer office, and Jack stated the affair of the bonds, the foreclosure, and the object of his visit, as briefly as possible. Young Mather

listened, comprehending more easily than Jack had hoped. At the end he said:—

“So these New York sharks are squeezing the breath out of you, and you want us to give your people a chance to breathe?”

Jack nodded.

“That’s it!” Stevenson exclaimed.

Young Mather laughed in a detached manner.

“Why, the General and Roger are hugging themselves over the idea that they are squeezing so successfully! They wouldn’t let go for worlds.”

Stevenson rose immediately, a round oath in his mouth. He wanted to punch somebody. Jack said nothing. After young Mather had had another laugh, he added:—

“Of course, you’re right. I should like to help you out, I really should.”

“Will you?” Jack asked doubtfully.

“What can I do? These bonds are my only rehabilitation in the family. They got them through me, by some odd chance, and they’re the only profitable things they ever got through me.”

“We don’t ask you to throw ’em away,” Stevenson put in.

“I don’t care what they do with them,” Mather remarked pleasantly. “I’ll state your case to Roger, anyway. Come in early this afternoon. Perhaps the General will be here. I was going out of town, but I suppose you are in a hurry.”

“The fellow who is getting squeezed generally is,” Stevenson answered ruefully.

When the two men returned in the afternoon, they were shown into the inner office. Instead of the General, whom Jack had hoped to see, Roger Mather walked in, after keeping them waiting half an hour. He bowed very slightly to Stevenson and his companion, and sat down at his desk. He was whiter, less athletic than his younger brother, and colder, more indifferent in his manners, which were scrupulously polite. He looked at Jack as if he had never seen him before, and Jack knew that they were wasting their time sitting there, whatever value it might have to them.

"My brother has told me of your extraordinary errand," Mather said slowly. "I can answer you very briefly. Our interests are in the hands of Hodder and Kimball of New York. I advise you to see them."

"Can we see General Mather?" Jack asked, rising at once from his chair.

"The General rarely comes in from Riverside," Mather answered slowly, looking at Jack with a gleam of passion in his eyes. "Besides, he would not see you in any case. I have answered you."

So here was the brief conclusion of his cherished plan. He could not even see General Mather! Roger Mather eyed him for several moments with the insolent assurance of having given checkmate. What evil chance had put this man again in his path? He longed to seize him; to feel his fingers about his enemy's neck, as he had years before.

"Come!" Stevenson muttered, turning away.

Jack waited, trying to find some words; and then slowly took his hat and followed Stevenson. A futile rage choked him. He might have foreseen from the start this inevitable defeat. He had rushed blindly into the hands of his enemy. The old quarrel had lain buried in his heart with his old love, his old world. But as the two friends slowly and silently retraced their way to their hotel, hate of this man raged and scorched him afresh. Hitherto he had fought the battle for the sake of his friend,—for his belief in the real justice of his cause. Now he longed to win in order that he might whip the cold, sneering man whose life he had once held in his strong hands.

"I suppose that ends it," Stevenson remarked as they reached their hotel.

"I suppose so!" Jack admitted heavily.

"Let's have a drink," Stevenson suggested. "If I don't, I'll hit somebody."

While they waited for their drinks, Jack's mind throbbed. He could not give up! A part of the strong new world under his feet seemed to be slipping away. The brute clamor of his will drove him on. As Stevenson finished his glass and slowly pulled his heavy body upright, with a little boyish sigh of disappointment, Jack said:—

"I am going out there—to see the General."

"Better save your car-fare," Stevenson advised.

"It isn't much—seventy cents round trip," Jack answered dryly. "Besides, it's my old home. Don't you want to visit the home of my youth?"

"Thanks. I'm going to see Nethersole—and try to get some consolation out of this damned town," Stevenson grumbled.

"You'll see me back before long."

"Hope so."

CHAPTER X

THE servant said that General Mather was walking in the garden with his daughter, and offered to call him. But Jack intimated that he would find them, — he knew his way, — and the servant let him out of the old hall to the terrace above the gardens. He could see the General at the other end of the walk, near the summer house, leaning on his cane, while his daughter stooped to pick something from the border. Jack walked down the path, his heart beating in trepidation. At the sound of his steps on the walk, General Mather looked up and scrutinized him, waiting for him to explain himself. He did not bow, even when Jack raised his hat, but across the old man's face there passed an expression of recollection. Jack thought that the General knew perfectly well who he was.

“General Mather,” he said finally, when he was but a few feet from the old man.

At the sound of the words Miss Mather turned, and perceiving Jack, hurried toward him, holding out her hand.

“What good fortune brought you here!” she exclaimed, with a cordiality unusual in her manner. “I am so glad to see you! Papa, you remember Mr. Pemberton. You met him at Mr. Hodder's office — in New York,” she added slowly.

General Mather bowed very slightly and murmured through his thin lips, "Mr. Pemberton."

His eyes were as sharp as ever, and, as they covered the young man, the recollection of the General's reading the account of Steve's embezzlement flashed oddly into Jack's mind.

"Do you like it in Iowa?" Miss Mather continued, trying to cover up her father's coldness of manner. "Are you still with Mr. Stevenson in the railroad?"

She asked a great many questions, to which Jack answered vaguely. The old man's blue eyes still rested on him, and the impartial scrutiny took away the little confidence he had. The three moved toward the house. Jack paused on the terrace, and said hurriedly that he had come to see the General on business.

"What is it?" General Mather asked abruptly, as if any business that the young man might have with him could be transacted where they stood. Miss Mather turned away and busied herself with a vine that was pushing its spring growth over the wall. Jack began awkwardly:—

"It is concerned with the railroad I am connected with—the Iowa and Northern."

The old man did not betray by the quiver of a muscle that he had ever heard of that piece of property. Jack told his story, at first stumbling over the details, and somewhat vague at important points, but speaking more fluently as he went on, seeming to realize that the case was lost but that he could make this old man feel it was a case worth fighting for. Some passion crept into his tones as he painted the cynical methods, by means of

which hundreds of little owners were to be wiped out, and the property turned over to its rival for a merely nominal sum, which would be shared by people who had bought the bonds at forty cents on the dollar as a pure speculation. At the close the old man asked simply:—

“Did you go to my office?”

Jack nodded.

“Did you see my son?”

“Yes.”

“What did he say?”

“He referred me to the lawyers who represent the majority bondholders—the very people who are conducting this deal.”

General Mather nodded approvingly.

“That is what I should have said.”

“You will not consider any other method of—of action?” Jack asked in a low voice.

General Mather moved toward the door of the house, and for reply said:—

“No! I don’t like to consider business matters in my house. Isabelle, I think it is growing cold. I shall go in for my tea.”

He bowed to Jack and left the terrace.

For a minute Jack stood where he had been left, staring out at the garden with the summer house at the end of the vista, his mind dulled by the sense of absolute defeat. He had clung tenaciously to every hope, and now that there was not one left, he felt an unreasonable despair, an inability to pull himself together.

"It is too bad," Miss Mather said, her eyes flashing with anger. "It is Roger, I am afraid."

Jack scarcely heard her. He had forgotten that she was there.

"I am very, very sorry," she continued. "I see it all! It is a mere matter of business to these bondholders. They have bought cheaply and want to sell for a high figure. And the other road can afford to pay them par for their bonds and more, because they haven't to pay the others who really own the road."

"That is about it," Jack answered wearily. "No wonder the ignorant fellow on a farm wants to pay his debts in cheap money, when this is the way —"

He broke off, realizing that he was talking to a woman who could not be interested in his conclusions.

"I have failed—that is all. And, of course, I see but one side. We offer very little but promises to the bondholders for waiting until better times. Good-by—I must get back to town."

"Don't go!" Miss Mather exclaimed. "You mustn't fail! You did it badly. You shouldn't have approached papa in that way. He hates to be taken by surprise. He isn't a hard man or unjust, but he has been very unsuccessful lately and thinks he has been cheated. I am sure if he could have the matter presented to him differently, at another time, he would feel more disposed to help your friends. You should have written to me first."

"I didn't think of that, and I am not sure I should have done it, anyway," Jack answered, with the man's dislike of engaging feminine coöperation in a business

affair. "Then there is your brother. General Mather had to be won at once before —" He hesitated again.

"Before Roger could influence him," she supplied. "Yes, Roger would do all in his power to defeat you, I am afraid."

Her heightened color and embarrassed manner made Jack wonder whether she knew the reasons for her brother's animosity to him.

"So it is of no use," Jack ended. "It is too late now."

"No! no!" the woman protested. "Roger doesn't come out here very often. You needn't be afraid of his influence. Tell me more about the road, all that you would have told my father if you had had a good chance. Perhaps I can do something."

He told her every detail that he knew, without much belief in her ability to change his ill fate, but grateful to her for her sympathy. As he went into the matter, describing the people concerned in the road, whom he had learned to know, and explaining the legal questions involved, he warmed again with his old enthusiasm and passion for the justice of his cause.

"You see," he ended, "how a small matter of business involves the happiness of a lot of people. This affair is a drop in the Wall Street bucket, but it means a great deal for some decent people."

"It means justice!" Miss Mather exclaimed, with a curious vibration of sympathetic passion in her voice.

"Justice — and for my friend and my friend's father, the power to keep faith with people who have trusted them."

"Yes!" she assented, touched by this appeal even more than by the other.

They looked into the quiet garden without speaking until Jack moved:—

"Well, I'm glad we had the talk, — we agree, and the failure —"

"Come to-morrow about eleven." She interrupted his idle speech with her sanguine words. "You will see my father again, I think, at that time, and don't put too much emphasis on his chance of getting as much for his bonds if he joins your side. Let him feel the justice of your cause. You and I and he are of the same blood!" she concluded.

"I'll make it strong enough!"

"To think that after all it will depend very largely on whether he has a good night or not! One takes a more liberal view of one's neighbors after a good sleep," she remarked whimsically as they shook hands.

The next morning Jack arrived at Riverside rather too early for his appointment, and to pass the time before eleven o'clock he strolled through Pancoast Lane, trying to recall in its twists and turns, its cottage fronts and gnarled trees, the vast geography it had been to him as a boy. When he reached the house where he had been born and lived so many phantom years, he scarcely recognized it. The dirty stucco walls had been freshly sanded and tinted; the decayed fence had been replaced by a thick hedge; the yard, where burdocks and plantains had rioted, was covered with grass. The spot which he had imagined all these years as a kind of cave of

despair, had become the suburban home of some clerk, and the two little children playing in the front yard had taken the place of his own discordant family. The change in his old home gave him in some remote way fresh courage and hope. That miasmatic past had faded into the unreality from which it had originally come. The discords, the phantoms, which had engulfed his father had fled. With hope, positive and vital, stirring in his heart, he left Pancoast Lane and climbed the little hill to General Mather's house. He found the old man sitting before a coal fire in one of the first floor rooms, which he used for a private library.

"Well," the General said, pointing to a chair on the other side of the fire, "my daughter felt that you didn't get a fair hearing yesterday."

The smile that broke beneath the white mustache convinced Jack that the General had had the necessary sleep.

"I was weak in pleading my case," Jack responded buoyantly, "but I have got my nerve this morning."

"Go on," General Mather said briefly, shielding his face from the fire with a newspaper.

And Jack had his chance. The General made no comments, did not interrupt, and frequently hid his face behind the newspaper, but Jack felt the old man's eyes ferretting into his mind, his ears absorbing every word, his keen mind revolving every consideration presented. When Jack had finished his plea, the General said nothing for a time which seemed to the young man interminable. Finally, scratching his thin white beard, he observed tentatively: —

"Your people out there in the West are rather fond of getting out of their obligations. That's what all this silver talk amounts to."

"As for that," Jack replied, "I can't say. I am a stranger still. But I know that the Stevensons aren't that kind!"

"You think this man Stevenson is honest?"

"I *know* he is honest."

"Well, is he a big enough man to reorganize the property and make it pay?"

"That it would be hard to tell," Jack answered cautiously. "But one fact is sure: the C. I. & M. wants the road, needs it, and they will pay a good deal more than they are likely to under the present scheme."

"You are asking me to take a very large risk. I suppose you know how many of these bonds I hold?"

"Only roughly. But the bonds are good — at least for what was paid for them."

General Mather smiled and again scratched his beard.

"You think they will resume payment on the bonds within a year? You see, I have to trust your information entirely!"

"You could send your own men out to examine the property," Jack suggested.

"That would take some time. I understand that the need is urgent."

"Immediate!"

And all had been said.

General Mather looked at Jack, and then looked at

the fire. Jack knew later how great a risk he had asked the General to run. Moreover, in the last years there had been severe losses on many of the Mather investments. Other Western railroads, and mines also, had ceased to pay their fixed charges. Ever since Greenacre and Co. had failed, General Mather had lost money. He was no longer a very rich man.

These considerations were doubtless passing through the old man's mind, and others also, which would be difficult to state in exact terms. It was said among his financial associates that Mather had lost none of his shrewdness, his tenacious grasp,—the money-making trick,—in spite of his advanced age. The blood ran thinner, the transparent skin grew whiter, but the cold blue eyes were as piercing as ever. Yet, at the beginning of his seventieth year, the old man was, possibly, in a more favorable mood for committing a rash quixotism than ever before in his life. He had never cherished any illusions about most aspects of life, and least of all about his sons. That they were futile people, he had accepted years ago as a grim irony. He had, nevertheless, scarcely considered whether it would be well to leave in their weak hands his estate. Like many men of his class he had skilfully contrived a trust into which his fortune would go until the third generation appeared,—in the vague hope that this future generation might be strong enough to hold it.

As he listened to the young lawyer's arguments, therefore, he was not much disturbed by fears of loss of property. To keep his wealth, to hand it on to the uncertain

future, did not appeal so strongly to the old man as it would have appealed to him years before. Moreover, the plea for justice, which his daughter had urged Jack to make the bulwark of his argument, had its effect. The sense of justice detached itself from personal considerations, from petty human motives; as years before it had urged him to the great conflict, now it urged him — old, passionless, removed from the stress of life — to perform an unselfish act. Thus the old man ended where the young man began. From out the shifting panorama of his life, with all its experience of men, good and bad, in labor to obtain their desires, few considerations appealed to him as important, steadfast, eternal, as did this consideration of human justice.

The old man still thought to himself, while Jack waited, counting the moments and wondering what was passing behind the bloodless face opposite him. . . . It was an unbusinesslike, young man's scheme. The General knew that well enough. He knew the inhuman laws of human business. He knew the chicanery of Wall Street — no one better. He knew that when one man had an advantage he must press it, even if he squeezed the breath of life from some unknown neighbor. He had never mixed philanthropy and business. But now, when he was about to relinquish his share in the human game, the desire to win no longer drove him on. He looked down upon life and saw writ large therein a few truths, — mercy, trust, justice.

"I will write the necessary letters this afternoon," he said quietly, when he had finished his meditation.

"You will withdraw from the majority bondholders!" Jack stammered, scarcely comprehending.

"No," the old man responded, with a slow smile. "The minority will become the majority — that is what you want, isn't it? My daughter wishes you to dine with us. We dine at one o'clock. You will find her in the library across the hall. Good morning, Mr. Pemberton."

There was something cold and distant even in the old man's amenities. Jack left him without thanking him, subtly aware that the considerations which had induced the General to act were not ones that called for thanks. When Jack opened the door to the library, Miss Mather rose from her desk, where she had been writing a letter, and came to meet him, an expectant smile upon her face.

"You succeeded?"

"I think the General had his good night!"

"Oh! Papa is a dear! You have to present things to him in proper form, though," Miss Mather rejoined, thus admitting her woman's share in the triumph. "And I presented a few!"

"I felt that!" Jack exclaimed. "Without you we should have lost."

"Perhaps. But now you want to send some telegrams, don't you? And write letters? This afternoon you shall do no business!"

She left him to send his telegrams, against his will, for he was eager to go over the affair, to savor all the pleasure of the triumph with this intelligent, sympathetic woman. But he sat down at her desk and did as he was bid.

After dinner they strolled through the garden, where the first tentative shoots of spring were pushing their way in the May sunshine. They came to the old pavilion at the end of the garden, where once Jack had concealed the loot taken from old man Cliff's fertile beds. It had been repaired, and held some garden chairs and a table for the tea service.

"Do you remember that I used to break through into this place, and you came here until —"

"Yes," Miss Mather interrupted, slowly blushing. "I remember very well! I must have been a nasty little girl."

"You couldn't understand — when I tried to explain how some things were real and some were not, and how hard it was to know which were really real, — those that most people thought were so, — or the other things!"

"I understand now a little better."

"It was odd!" Jack mused. "It has all been odd — until very lately. I don't wonder you thought I was not a desirable acquaintance," he continued, with a laugh. "But it was true, what I tried to tell you; the deepest truth I knew. There were two worlds! And only very lately I discovered which was real."

They talked through the long afternoon, intimately, as if they had gone back to the simple time when they were boy and girl. He told her of the dreams he had dreamed, which were more real than what people called the world; of the struggle that had made up his life between these two worlds; of the conquest by the dead benumbing world during the years he had labored in New York,

and of the final escape, — the truths he had never spoken, had but half realized; the truths a man speaks of rarely, if he cherishes them.

“And now I know,” he said, speaking as much to himself as to her. “Life is splendidly real! This promise of your father is a part of it. . . . He mustn’t lose!” he broke off grimly.

“He will not lose,” she answered, with conviction.

“No! Stevenson will feel double obligation, now. How relieved he must be! He can go back to that town and look his neighbors in the face. The men who have trusted him will not be ruined.”

They walked slowly to the terrace, Jack’s mind still full of this topic.

“It is a great thing to have kept faith!” he exclaimed, thinking of Stevenson and the troubled affairs of the Iowa and Northern.

“Yes,” the woman responded, looking at Jack, her eyes illuminated with a larger thought. “It is a great thing to have kept faith with life!”

EPILOGUE

AFTER the days of heavy September rain the sky is purest blue along the North Shore, and the air so transparent that the distant hills of Green Bay mount firm and large from the water's edge. The westerly wind sweeps across the Bay, crowding far out to the open sea the last wreaths of the broken fog-banks. Then the restless summer people have scattered; their houses and hotels are closed and forlorn. But the little white cottages of the farms shine like beacons along the shore. The great peace of winter casts its shadow before, and with the heavens washed clean and fair the seasons seem to sleep.

In this October beneficence Jack returned to Pemberton Neck. The tasks of the year had been done. And the larger enterprises of youth and manhood were pushing forth toward their completion. The Iowa and Northern had been reorganized and not rifled. In the new road he had his place. His brother Steve had come from the Ohio prison, and had gone with his wife and child to one of Stevenson's wheat farms in the Red River valley. Mary and Ruth's children were happy in his home at Mound City. . . .

As the steamer swept into the Bay, his eye fell upon the dimpled crest of the hills where he had once lain

down to dream. He remembered the vision of his dream, — the face that had come to him from time to time in the stress of his life, a face unlike any that he had ever met. Then he turned to his companion whose eyes had followed his gaze, and something therein new-born, some new revelation of spirit, touched the features he loved. She spoke to him now as she had spoken to him as a boy in his dream, — with tenderness and appeal and love.

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